LONDON POEMS

LONDON POEMS

By ROBERT BUCHANAN



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TO

WILLIAM HEPWORTH DIXON.

> "Nostrorum sermonum candide judex. . . .
> Curantem quidquid dignum sapiente bonoque est.
> Non Tu corpus eras sine pectore."
>
> HORACE, Epp. I. 4.

MY DEAR DIXON,—This book is inscribed to you; and lest you should ask wherefore, I will refresh your memory. Seven years ago, when I was an ambitious lad in Scotland, and when the north-easter was blowing coldly on me, you sent me such good words as cheered and warmed me. You were one of two (the gentle, true, and far-seeing George Henry Lewes was the other) who first believed that I was fitted for noble efforts. Since then you have known me better, and abode by your first hope. Nor have you failed to exhibit the virtue, not possessed by one writer in a hundred, of daring to express publicly your confidence in an unacknowledged author.

One word concerning the present volume. "London Poems" are the last of what I may term my "poems of probation,"—wherein I have fairly hinted what I am trying to assimilate in life and thought. However much my method may be confounded with the methods of other writers, I am sure to get quartered (to my cost, perhaps) on my own merits by and by.

Accept these poems,—given under a genuine impulse, and not merely in compliment. Of your fine qualities I will say nothing. Your candour may offend knaves and your reticence mislead fools; but be happy in your goodness, and in the loving homage of those dearest to you.—And believe me,

Always your Friend,

ROBERT BUCHANAN.

BEXHILL, SUSSEX, *June* 1866.

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LONDON POEMS

Greift nur hinein in's volle Menſchenleben!
Ein jeder lebt's, nicht vielen iſt's bekannt,
Und wo ihr's packt, da iſt's intereſſant.

Faust—Vorspiel auf dem Theater.



BEXHILL, 1866.

NOW, when the catkins of the hazel swing
Wither'd above the leafy nook wherein
The chaffinch breasts her five blue speckled eggs,
All round the thorn grows fragrant, white with may,
And underneath the fresh wild hyacinth-bed
Shimmers like water in the whispering wind;
Now, on this sweet still gloaming of the spring,
Within my cottage by the sea, I sit,
Thinking of yonder city where I dwelt,
Wherein I sicken'd, and whereof I learn'd
So much that dwells like music on my brain.
A melancholy happiness is mine!
My thoughts, like blossoms of the muschatel.
Smell sweetest in the gloaming; and I feel
Visions and vanishings of other years,—

Faint as the scent of distant clover meadows—
Sweet, sweet, though they awaken serious cares—
Beautiful, beautiful, though they make me weep.

The good days dead, the well-belovèd gone
Before me, lonely I abode amid
The buying, and the selling, and the strife
Of little natures; yet there still remain'd
Something to thank the Lord for.—I could live!
On winter nights, when wind and snow were out,
Afford a pleasant fire to keep me warm;
And while I sat, with homeward-looking eyes,
And while I heard the humming of the town,
I fancied 'twas the sound I used to hear
In Scotland, when I dwelt beside the sea.
I knew not how it was, or why it was,
I only heard a sea-sound, and was sad.
It haunted me and pain'd me, and it made
That little life of penmanship a dream!
And yet it served my soul for company,
When the dark city gather'd on my brain,
And from the solitude came never a voice
To bring the good days back, and show my heart
It was not quite a solitary thing.

The purifying trouble grew and grew,
Till silentness was more than I could bear.
Brought by the ocean murmur from afar,
Came silent phantoms of the misty hills
Which I had known and loved in other days;
And, ah! from time to time, the hum of life
Around me, the strange faces of the streets,
Mingling with those thin phantoms of the hills,
And with that ocean-murmur, made a cloud
That changed around my life with shades and sounds,
And, melting often in the light of day,
Left on my brow dews of aspiring dream.
And then I sang of Scottish dales and dells,
And human shapes that lived and moved therein,
Made solemn in the shadow of the hills.
Thereto, not seldom, did I seek to make
The busy life of London musical,
And phrase in modern song the troubled lives
Of dwellers in the sunless lanes and streets.
Yet ever I was haunted from afar,
While singing; and the presence of the mountains
Was on me; and the murmur of the sea
Deepen'd my mood; while everywhere I saw.

Flowing beneath the blackness of the streets,
The current of sublimer, sweeter life,
Which is the source of human smiles and tears,
And, melodised, becomes the strength of song.

Darkling, I long'd for utterance, whereby
Poor people might be holpen, gladden'd, cheer'd;
Brightning at times, I sang for singing's sake.
The wild wind of ambition grew subdued,
And left the changeful current of my soul
Crystal and pure and clear, to glass like water
The sad and beautiful of human life;
And, even in the unsung city's streets,
Seem'd quiet wonders meet for serious song,
Truth hard to phrase and render musical.
For ah! the weariness and weight of tears,
The crying out to God, the wish for slumber,
They lay so deep, so deep! God heard them all;
He set them unto music of His own;
But easier far the task to sing of kings,
Or weave weird ballads where the moon-dew glistens,
Than body forth this life in beauteous sound.
The crowd had voices, but each living man
Within the crowd seem'd silence-smit and hard:

They only heard the murmur of the town,
They only felt the dimness in their eyes,
And now and then turn'd startled, when they saw
Some weary one fling up his arms and drop,
Clay-cold, among them,—and they scarcely grieved,
But hush'd their hearts a time, and hurried on.

'Twas comfort deep as tears to sit alone,
Haunted by shadows from afar away,
And try to utter forth, in tuneful speech,
What lay so musically on my heart.
But, though it sweeten'd life, it seem'd in vain.
For while I sang, much that was clear before—
The souls of men and women in the streets,
The sounding sea, the presence of the hills,
And all the weariness, and all the fret,
And all the dim, strange pain for what had fled—
Turn'd into mist, mingled before mine eyes,
Roll'd up like wreaths of smoke to heaven, and
    died:
The pen dropt from my hand, mine eyes grew
    dim,
And the great roar was in mine ears again,
And I was all alone in London streets.

Hither to pastoral solitude I came,
Happy to breathe again serener air
And feel a purer sunshine; and the woods
And meadows were to me an ecstasy,
The singing birds a glory, and the trees
A green perpetual feast to fill the eye
And shimmer in upon the soul; but chief,
There came the murmur of the waters, sounds
Of sunny tides that wash on silver sands,
Or cries of waves that anguish'd and went white
Under the eyes of lightnings. 'Twas a bliss
Beyond the bliss of dreaming, yet in time
It grew familiar as my mother's face;
And when the wonder and the ecstasy
Had mingled with the beatings of my heart,
The terrible City loom'd from far away
And gather'd on me cloudily, dropping dews,
Even as those phantoms of departed days
Had haunted me in London streets and lanes.
Wherefore in brighter mood I sought again
To make the life of London musical,
And sought the mirror of my soul for shapes
That linger'd, faces bright or agonised,
Yet ever taking something beautiful

From glamour of green branches, and of clouds
That glided piloted by golden airs.

And if I list to sing of sad things oft,
It is that sad things in this life of breath
Are truest, sweetest, deepest. Tears bring forth
The richness of our natures, as the rain
Sweetens the smelling brier; and I, thank God,
Have anguish'd here in no ignoble tears—
Tears for the pale friend with the singing lips,
Tears for the father with the gentle eyes
(My dearest up in heaven next to God)
Who loved me like a woman. I have wrought
No girlond of the rose and passion-flower,
Grown in a careful garden in the sun;
But I have gather'd samphire dizzily,
Close to the hollow roaring of a Sea.

Far away in the dark
  Breaketh that living Sea,
Wave upon wave; and hark!
  These voices are blown to me;
For a great wind rises and blows,
  Wafting the sea-sound near,
But it fitfully comes and goes,
  And I cannot always hear;
Green boughs are flashing around,
  And the flowers at my feet are fair,
And the wind that bringeth the ocean-sound
  Grows sweet with the country air.

I.

THE LITTLE MILLINER:

A Love Poem.

With fairy foot and fearless gaze
She passes pure through evil ways;
She wanders in the sinful town,
    And loves to hear the deep sea-music
Of people passing up and down.

Fear nor shame nor sin hath she,
But, like a sea-bird on the Sea,
Floats hither, thither, day and night:
    The great black waters cannot harm her,
Because she is so weak and light.

THE LITTLE MILLINER.

MY girl hath violet eyes and yellow hair,
A soft hand, like a lady's, small and fair,
A sweet face pouting in a white straw bonnet,
A tiny foot, and little boot upon it;
And all her finery to charm beholders
Is the gray shawl drawn tight around her shoulders,
The plain stuff-gown and collar white as snow,
And sweet red petticoat that peeps below.
But gladly in the busy town goes she,
Summer and winter, fearing nobodie;
She pats the pavement with her fairy feet,
With fearless eyes she charms the crowded street;
And in her pocket lie, in lieu of gold,
A lucky sixpence and a thimble old.

We lodged in the same house a year ago:
She on the topmost floor, I just below,—
She, a poor milliner, content and wise,
I, a poor city clerk, with hopes to rise;
And, long ere we were friends, I learnt to love
The little angel on the floor above.
For, every morn, ere from my bed I stirr'd,
Her chamber door would open, and I heard,—
And listen'd, blushing, to her coming down,
And palpitated with her rustling gown,
And tingled while her foot went downward slow,
Creak'd like a cricket, pass'd, and died below;
Then peeping from the window, pleased and sly,
I saw the pretty shining face go by,
Healthy and rosy, fresh from slumber sweet,—
A sunbeam in the quiet morning street.
All winter long, witless who peep'd the while,
She sweeten'd the chill mornings with her smile:
When the soft snow was falling dimly white,
Shining among it with a child's delight,
Bright as a rose, though nipping winds might blow,
And leaving fairy footprints in the snow!

And every night, when in from work she tript,

Red to the ears I from my chamber slipt,
That I might hear upon the narrow stair
Her low "Good evening," as she pass'd me there.
And when her door was closed, below sat I,
And hearken'd stilly as she stirr'd on high,—
Watch'd the red firelight shadows in the room,
Fashion'd her face before me in the gloom,
And heard her close the window, lock the door,
Moving about more lightly than before,
And thought, "She is undressing now!" and oh!
My cheeks were hot, my heart was in a glow!
And I made pictures of her,—standing bright
Before the looking-glass in bed-gown white,
Upbinding in a knot her yellow hair,
Then kneeling timidly to say a prayer;
Till, last, the floor creak'd softly overhead,
'Neath bare feet tripping to the little bed,—
And all was hush'd. Yet still I hearken'd on,
Till the faint sounds about the streets were gone;
And saw her slumbering with lips apart,
One little hand upon her little heart,
The other pillowing a face that smiled
In slumber like the slumber of a child,
The bright hair shining round the small white ear.

The soft breath stealing visible and clear,
And mixing with the moon's, whose frosty gleam
Made round her rest a vaporous light of dream.

How free she wander'd in the wicked place,
Protected only by her gentle face!
She saw bad things—how could she choose but see?—
She heard of wantonness and misery;
The city closed around her night and day,
But lightly, happily, she went her way.
Nothing of evil that she saw or heard
Could touch a heart so innocently stirr'd,—
By simple hopes that cheer'd it through the storm,
And little flutterings that kept it warm.
No power had she to reason out her needs,
To give the whence and wherefore of her deeds;
But she was good and pure amid the strife,
By virtue of the joy that was her life.
Here, where a thousand spirits daily fall,
Where heart and soul and senses turn to gall,
She floated, pure as innocent could be,
Like a small sea-bird on a stormy sea,

Which breasts the billows, wafted to and fro,
Fearless, uninjured, while the strong winds blow,
While the clouds gather, and the waters roar,
And mighty ships are broken on the shore.

And London streets, with all their noise and stir,
Had many a pleasant sight to pleasure her.
There were the shops, where wonders ever new,
As in a garden, changed the whole year through.
Oft would she stand and watch with laughter sweet
The Punch and Judy in the quiet street;
Or look and listen while soft minuets
Play'd the street organ with the marionettes;
Or join the motley group of merry folks
Round the street huckster with his wares and jokes.
Fearless and glad, she join'd the crowd that flows
Along the streets at festivals and shows.
In summer time, she loved the parks and squares,
Where fine folk drive their carriages and pairs;
In winter time her blood was in a glow,
At the white coming of the pleasant snow;
And in the stormy nights, when dark rain pours,
She found it pleasant, too, to sit indoors,

And sing and sew, and listen to the gales,
Or read the penny journal with the tales.

Once in the year, at merry Christmas time,
She saw the glories of a pantomime,
Feasted and wonder'd, laugh'd and clapp'd aloud,
Up in the gallery among the crowd,
Gathering dreams of fairyland and fun
To cheer her till another year was done;
More happy, and more near to heaven, so,
Than many a lady in the tiers below.

And just because her heart was pure and glad,
She lack'd the pride that finer ladies had:
She had no scorn for those who lived amiss,—
The weary women with their painted bliss;
It never struck her little brain, be sure,
She was so very much more fine and pure.
Softly she pass'd them in the public places,
Marvelling at their fearful childish faces;
She shelter'd near them, when a shower would fall,
And felt a little frighten'd, that was all,
And watch'd them, noting as they stood close by
Their dress and fine things with a woman's eye,

And spake a gentle word if spoken to,—
And wonder'd if their mothers lived and knew.

Her look, her voice, her step, had witchery
And sweetness that were all in all to me!
We both were friendless, yet, in fear and doubt,
I sought in vain for courage to speak out.
Wilder my heart could ne'er have throbb'd before her,
My thoughts have stoop'd more humbly to adore her,
My love more timid and more still have grown,
Had Polly been a queen upon a throne.
All I could do was wish and dream and sigh,
Blush to the ears whene'er she pass'd me by,
Still comforted, although she did not love me,
Because her little room was just above me.

'Twas when the spring was coming, when the snow
Had melted, and fresh winds began to blow,
And girls were selling violets in the town,
That suddenly a fever struck me down.
The world was changed, the sense of life was pain'd,
And nothing but a shadow-land remain'd;
Death came in a dark mist and look'd at me,
I felt his breathing, though I could not see,

But heavily I lay and did not stir,
And had strange images and dreams of her.
Then came a vacancy: with feeble breath,
I shiver'd under the cold touch of Death,
And swoon'd among strange visions of the dead,
When a voice call'd from Heaven, and he fled;
And suddenly I waken'd, as it seem'd,
From a deep sleep wherein I had not dream'd.

And it was night, and I could see and hear,
And I was in the room I held so dear,
And unaware, stretch'd out upon my bed,
I hearken'd for a footstep overhead.

But all was hush'd. I look'd around the room,
And slowly made out shapes amid the gloom.
The wall was redden'd by a rosy light,
A faint fire flicker'd, and I knew 'twas night,
Because below there was a sound of feet
Dying away along the quiet street,—
When, turning my pale face and sighing low,
I saw a vision in the quiet glow:
A little figure, in a cotton gown,
Looking upon the fire and stooping down,

Her side to me, her face illumed, she eyed
Two chestnuts burning slowly, side by side,—
Her lips apart, her clear eyes strain'd to see,
Her little hands clasp'd tight around her knee,
The firelight gleaming on her golden head,
And tinting her white neck to rosy red,
Her features bright, and beautiful, and pure,
With childish fear and yearning half demure.

Oh, sweet, sweet dream! I thought, and strain'd mine eyes,
Fearing to break the spell with words and sighs.

Softly she stoop'd, her dear face sweetly fair,
And sweeter since a light like love was there,
Brightening, watching, more and more elate,
As the nuts glow'd together in the grate,
Crackling with little jets of fiery light,
Till side by side they turn'd to ashes white,—
Then up she leapt, her face cast off its fear
For rapture that itself was radiance clear,
And would have clapp'd her little hands in glee,
But, pausing, bit her lips and peep'd at me,
And met the face that yearn'd on her so whitely,

And gave a cry and trembled, blushing brightly,
While, raised on elbow, as she turn'd to flee,
"*Polly!*" I cried,—and grew as red as she!

It was no dream!—for soon my thoughts were clear,
And she could tell me all, and I could hear:
How in my sickness friendless I had lain,
How the hard people pitied not my pain;
How, in despite of what bad people said,
She left her labours, stopp'd beside my bed,
And nursed me, thinking sadly I would die;
How, in the end, the danger pass'd me by;
How she had sought to steal away before
The sickness pass'd, and I was strong once more.
By fits she told the story in mine ear,
And troubled all the telling with a fear
Lest by my cold man's heart she should be chid,
Lest I should think her bold in what she did;
But, lying on my bed, I dared to say,
How I had watch'd and loved her many a day,
How dear she was to me, and dearer still
For that strange kindness done while I was ill,
And how I could but think that Heaven above
Had done it all to bind our lives in love.

And Polly cried, turning her face away,
And seem'd afraid, and answer'd "yea" nor "nay;"
Then stealing close, with little pants and sighs,
Look'd on my pale thin face and earnest eyes,
And seem'd in act to fling her arms about
My neck, then, blushing, paused, in fluttering doubt,
Last, sprang upon my heart, sighing and sobbing,—
That I might feel how gladly hers was throbbing!

Ah! ne'er shall I forget until I die
How happily the dreamy days went by,
While I grew well, and lay with soft heart-beats,
Heark'ning the pleasant murmur from the streets,
And Polly by me like a sunny beam,
And life all changed, and love a drowsy dream!
'Twas happiness enough to lie and see
The little golden head bent droopingly
Over its sewing, while the still time flew,
And my fond eyes were dim with happy dew!
And then, when I was nearly well and strong,
And she went back to labour all day long,
How sweet to lie alone with half-shut eyes,
And hear the distant murmurs and the cries,

And think how pure she was from pain and sin,—
And how the summer days were coming in!
Then, as the sunset faded from the room,
To listen for her footstep in the gloom,
To pant as it came stealing up the stair,
To feel my whole life brighten unaware
When the soft tap came to the door, and when
The door was open'd for her smile again!
Best, the long evenings!—when, till late at night,
She sat beside me in the quiet light,
And happy things were said and kisses won,
And serious gladness found its vent in fun.
Sometimes I would draw close her shining head,
And pour her bright hair out upon the bed,
And she would laugh, and blush, and try to scold,
While "Here," I cried, "I count my wealth in gold!"
Sometimes we play'd at cards, and thrill'd with bliss,
On trumping one another with a kiss.
And oft our thoughts grew sober and found themes
Of wondrous depth in marriage plans and schemes;
And she with pretty calculating lips
Sat by me, cautious to the finger-tips,
Till, all our calculations grown a bore,
We summ'd them up in kisses as before!

Once, like a little sinner for transgression,
She blush'd upon my breast, and made confession;
How, when that night I woke and look'd around,
I found her busy with a charm profound,—
One chestnut was herself, my girl confess'd,
The other was the person she loved best,
And if they burn'd together side by side,
He loved her, and she would become his bride;
And burn indeed they did, to her delight,—
And had the pretty charm not proven right?
Thus much, and more, with timorous joy, she said,
While her confessor, too, grew rosy red,—
And close together press'd two blissful faces,
As I absolved the sinner, with embraces.

And here is winter come again, winds blow,
The houses and the streets are white with snow;
And in the long and pleasant eventide,
Why, what is Polly making at my side?
What but a silk-gown, beautiful and grand,
We bought together lately in the Strand!
What but a dress to go to church in soon,
And wear right queenly 'neath a honey-moon!
And who shall match her with her new straw bonnet,

Her tiny foot and little boot upon it,
Embroider'd petticoat and silk-gown new,
And shawl she wears as few fine ladies do?
And she will keep, to charm away all ill,
The lucky sixpence in her pocket still;
And we will turn, come fair or cloudy weather,
To ashes, like the chestnuts, close together!

II.

LIZ.

The crimson light of sunset falls
    Through the gray glamour of the murmuring rain
And creeping o'er the housetops crawls
    Through the black smoke upon the broken pane.
Steals to the straw on which she lies,
    And tints her thin black hair and hollow cheeks,
Her sun-tann'd neck, her glistening eyes,—
    While faintly, sadly, fitfully she speaks.
But when it is no longer light,
    The pale girl smiles, with only One to mark.
And dies upon the breast of Night,
    Like trodden snowdrift melting in the dark.

LIZ.

I.

HEY, rain, rain, rain!
It patters down the glass, and on the sill,
And splashes in the pools along the lane—
Then gives a kind of shiver, and is still:
One likes to hear it, though, when one is ill.
Rain, rain, rain, rain!
Hey, how it pours and pours!
Rain, rain, rain, rain!
A dismal day for poor girls out-o'-doors!

II.

Ah, don't! That sort of comfort makes me cry.
And, Parson, since I'm bad, I want to die.

The roaring of the street,
The tramp of feet,
The sobbing of the rain,
Bring nought but pain;
They 're gone into the aching of my brain;
And whether it be light,
Or dark dead night,
Wherever I may be, I hear them plain!
I 'm lost and weak, and can no longer bear
To wander, like a shadow, here and there—
As useless as a stone—tired out—and sick!
So that they put me down to slumber quick,
It does not matter where.
No one will miss me; all will hurry by,
And never cast a thought on one so low;
Fine gentlemen miss ladies when they go,
But folk care nought for such a thing as I.

III.

'Tis bad, I know, to talk like that—too bad!
Joe, though he 's often hard, is strong and true—
[Ah, Joe meant well]—and there's the baby, too!—
But I 'm so tired and sad.
I 'm glad it was a boy, sir, very glad.

A man can fight along, can say his say,
  Is not look'd down upon, holds up his head,
  And, at a push, can always earn his bread:
Men have the best of it, in many a way.
But ah! 'tis hard indeed for girls to keep
  Decent and honest, tramping in the town,—
  Their best but bad—made light of—beaten down—
Wearying ever, wearying for sleep.
If they grow hard, go wrong, from bad to badder,
  Why, Parson, dear, they 're happier being blind:
  They get no thanks for being good and kind—
The better that they are, they feel the sadder!

IV.

Nineteen! nineteen!
  Only nineteen, and yet so old, so old;—
I feel like fifty, Parson—I have been
  So wicked, I suppose, and life 's so cold!
Ah, cruel are the wind, and rain, and snow,
  And I 've been out for years among them all:
  I scarce remember being weak and small
Like baby there—it was so long ago.
It does not seem that I was born. I woke,

One day, long, long ago, in a dark room,
And saw the housetops round me in the smoke,
And, leaning out, look'd down into the gloom,
Saw deep black pits, blank walls, and broken panes,
And eyes, behind the panes, that flash'd at me,
And heard an awful roaring, from the lanes,
Of folk I could not see;
Then, while I look'd and listen'd in a dream,
I turn'd my eyes upon the housetops gray,
And saw, between the smoky roofs, a gleam
Of silver water, winding far away.
That was the River. Cool and smooth and deep,
It glided to the sound o' folk below,
Dazzling my eyes, till they began to grow
Dusty and dim with sleep.
Oh, sleepily I stood, and gazed, and hearken'd!
And saw a strange, bright light, that slowly fled,
Shine through the smoky mist, and stain it red,
And suddenly the water flash'd,—then darken'd;
And for a little time, though I gazed on,
The river and the sleepy light were gone;
But suddenly, over the roofs there lighten'd
A pale, strange brightness out of heaven shed,
And, with a sweep that made me sick and frighten'd,

The yellow Moon roll'd up above my head;—
And down below me roar'd the noise o' trade,
And ah! I felt alive, and was afraid,
And cold, and hungry, crying out for bread.

V.

All that is like a dream. It don't seem *true!*
Father was gone, and mother left, you see,
To work for little brother Ned and me;
And up among the gloomy roofs we grew,—
Lock'd in full oft, lest we should wander out,
With nothing but a crust o' bread to eat,
While mother char'd for poor folk round about,
Or sold cheap odds and ends from street to street.
Yet, Parson, there were pleasures fresh and fair,
To make the time pass happily up there:
A steamboat going past upon the tide,
A pigeon lighting on the roof close by,
The sparrows teaching little ones to fly,
The small white moving clouds, that we espied,
And thought were living, in the bit of sky—
With sights like these right glad were Ned and I;
And then, we loved to hear the soft rain calling,
Pattering, pattering, upon the tiles,

And it was fine to see the still snow falling,
  Making the housetops white for miles on miles,
And catch it in our little hands in play,
And laugh to feel it melt and slip away!
But I was six, and Ned was only three,
And thinner, weaker, wearier than me;
  And one cold day, in winter time, when mother
Had gone away into the snow, and we
  Sat close for warmth and cuddled one another,
He put his little head upon my knee,
And went to sleep, and would not stir a limb,
  But look'd quite strange and old;
And when I shook him, kiss'd him, spoke to him,
  He smiled, and grew so cold.
Then I was frighten'd, and cried out, and none
  Could hear me; while I sat and nursed his head,
Watching the whiten'd window, while the Sun
  Peep'd in upon his face, and made it red.
And I began to sob;—till mother came,
Knelt down, and scream'd, aud named the good
    God's name,
  And told me he was dead.
And when she put his night-gown on, and, weeping,
  Placed him among the rags upon his bed,

I thought that brother Ned was only sleeping,
And took his little hand, and felt no fear.
But when the place grew gray and cold and drear,
And the round Moon over the roofs came creeping,
And put a silver shade
All round the chilly bed where he was laid,
I cried, and was afraid.

VI.

Ah, yes, it's like a dream; for time pass'd by,
And I went out into the smoky air,
Fruit-selling, Parson—trudging, wet or dry—
Winter and summer—weary, cold, and bare.
And when old mother laid her down to die,
And parish buried her, I did not cry,
And hardly seem'd to care;
I was too hungry, and too dull; beside,
The roar o' streets had made me dry as dust—
It took me all my time, howe'er I tried,
To keep my limbs alive and earn a crust;
I had no time for weeping.
And when I was not out amid the roar,
Or standing frozen at the playhouse door,
Why, I was coil'd upon my straw, and sleeping.

Ah, pence were hard to gain!
Some girls were pretty, too, but I was plain:
Fine ladies never stopp'd and look'd and smiled,
  And gave me money for my face's sake.
That made me hard and angry when a child;
  But now it thrills my heart, and makes it ache!
The pretty ones, poor things, what could they do,
  Fighting and starving in the wicked town,
  But go from bad to badder—down, down, down—
Being so poor, and yet so pretty, too?
Never could bear the like of that—ah, no!
Better have starved outright than gone so low!

VII.

But I've no call to boast. I might have been
  As wicked, Parson dear, in my distress,
But for your friend—you know the one I mean?—
  The tall, pale lady, in the mourning dress.
Though we were cold at first, that wore away—
          She was so mild and young,
          And had so soft a tongue,
And eyes to sweeten what she loved to say.
She never seem'd to scorn me—no, not she;
And (what was best) she seem'd as sad as me!

Not one of those that make a girl feel base,
And call her names, and talk of her disgrace,
And frighten one with thoughts of flaming hell,
  And fierce Lord God, with black and angry brow;
But soft and mild, and sensible as well;
  And oh, I loved her, and I love her now.
She did me good for many and many a day—
  More good than pence could ever do, I swear,
  For she was poor, with little pence to spare—
Learn'd me to read, and quit low words, and pray.
And, Parson, though I never understood
How such a life as mine was meant for good,
And could not guess what one so poor and low
  Would do in that sweet place of which she spoke,
And could not feel that God would let me go
  Into so bright a land with gentlefolk,
I liked to hear her talk of such a place,
  And thought of all the angels she was best,
Because her soft voice soothed me, and her face
  Made my words gentle, put my heart at rest.

VIII.

Ah, sir! 'twas very lonesome. Night and day,
  Save when the sweet miss came, I was alone,—

Moved on and hunted through the streets of stone,
And even in dreams afraid to rest or stay.
Then, other girls had lads to work and strive for;
I envied them, and did not know 'twas wrong,
And often, very often, used to long
For some one I could like and keep alive for.
Marry? Not they!
They can't afford to be so good, you know;
But many of them, though they step astray,
Indeed don't mean to sin so much, or go
Against what's decent. Only—'tis their way.
And many might do worse than that, may be,
If they had ne'er a one to fill a thought—
It sounds half wicked, but poor girls like me
Must sin a little, to be good in aught.

IX.

So I was glad when I began to see
That Joe the costermonger fancied me;
And when, one night, he took me to the play,
Over on Surrey side, and offer'd fair
That we should take a little room and share
Our earnings, why, I could not answer "Nay!"

And that's a year ago; and though I'm bad,
  I've been as true to Joe as girl could be.
I don't complain a bit of Joe, dear lad,
  Joe never, never meant but well to me;
And we have had as fair a time, I think,
  As one could hope, since we are both so low.
  Joe likes me—never gave me push or blow,
When sober: only, he was wild in drink.
But then we don't mind beating when a man
  Is angry, if he likes us and keeps straight,
Works for his bread, and does the best he can;—
  'Tis being left and slighted that we hate.

X.

And so the baby's come, and I shall die!
  And though 'tis hard to leave poor baby here,
  Where folk will think him bad, and all's so drear,
The great LORD GOD knows better far than I.
Ah, don't!—'tis kindly, but it pains me so!
You say I'm wicked, and I want to go!
"GOD's kingdom," Parson dear? Ah nay, ah nay!
  That must be like the country—which I fear:
I saw the country once, one summer-day,
  And I would rather die in London here!

XI.

For I was sick of hunger, cold, and strife,
And took a sudden fancy in my head
To try the country, and to earn my bread
Out among fields, where I had heard one's life
Was easier and brighter. So, that day,
I took my basket up and stole away,
Just after sunrise. As I went along,
Trembling and loath to leave the busy place,
I felt that I was doing something wrong,
And fear'd to look policemen in the face.
And all was dim: the streets were gray and wet
After a rainy night: and all was still;
I held my shawl around me with a chill,
And dropt my eyes from every face I met;
Until the streets began to fade, the road
Grew fresh and clean and wide,
Fine houses where the gentlefolk abode,
And gardens full of flowers, on every side.
That made me walk the quicker—on, on, on—
As if I were asleep with half-shut eyes,
And all at once I saw, to my surprise,
The houses of the gentlefolk were gone,

And I was standing still,
Shading my face, upon a high green hill,
And the bright sun was blazing,
And all the blue above me seem'd to melt
To burning, flashing gold, while I was gazing
On the great smoky cloud where I had dwelt.

XII.

I 'll ne'er forget that day. All was so bright
And strange. Upon the grass around my feet
The rain had hung a million drops of light;
The air, too, was so clear and warm and sweet,
It seem'd a sin to breathe it. All around
Were hills and fields and trees that trembled through
A burning, blazing fire of gold and blue;
And there was not a sound,
Save a bird singing, singing, in the skies,
And the soft wind, that ran along the ground,
And blew full sweetly on my lips and eyes.
Then, with my heavy hand upon my chest,
Because the bright air pain'd me, trembling, sighing,
I stole into a dewy field to rest,

And oh, the green, green grass where I was lying
Was fresh and living—and the bird sang loud,
Out of a golden cloud—
And I was looking up at him and crying!

XIII.

How swift the hours slipt on!—and by and by
The sun grew red, big shadows fill'd the sky,
The air grew damp with dew,
And the dark night was coming down, I knew.
Well, I was more afraid than ever, then,
And felt that I should die in such a place,—
So back to London town I turn'd my face,
And crept into the great black streets again;
And when I breathed the smoke and heard the roar,
Why, I was better, for in London here
My heart was busy, and I felt no fear.
I never saw the country any more.
And I have stay'd in London, well or ill—
I would not stay out yonder if I could.
For one feels dead, and all looks pure and good—
I could not bear a life so bright and still.
All that I want is sleep,
Under the flags and stones, so deep, so deep!

God won't be hard on one so mean, but He,
Perhaps, will let a tired girl slumber sound
There in the deep cold darkness under ground;
And I shall waken up in time, may be,
Better and stronger, not afraid to see
The great, still Light that folds Him round and round!

XIV.

See! there's the sunset creeping through the pane—
How cool and moist it looks amid the rain!
I like to hear the slashing of the drops
On the house tops,
And the loud humming of the folk that go
Along the streets below!
I like the smoke and roar—I am so bad—
They make a low one hard, and still her cares....
There's Joe! I hear his foot upon the stairs!—
He must be wet, poor lad!
He will be angry, like enough, to find
Another little life to clothe and keep.
But show him baby, Parson—speak him kind—
And tell him Doctor thinks I'm going to sleep.
A hard, hard life is his! He need be strong

And rough, to earn his bread and get along.
I think he will be sorry when I go,
  And leave the little one and him behind.
  I hope he'll see another to his mind,
To keep him straight and tidy. Poor old Joe!

III

THE STARLING.

THE STARLING.

I.

THE little lame tailor
    Sat stitching and snarling—
Who in the world
    Was the tailor's darling?
To none of his kind
Was he well-inclined,
    But he doted on Jack the starling.

II.

For the bird had a tongue,
    And of words good store,

And his cage was hung
 Just over the door.
And he saw the people,
 And heard the roar,—
Folk coming and going
 Evermore,—
And he look'd at the tailor,—
 And swore.

III.

From a country lad
 The tailor bought him,—
His training was bad,
 For tramps had taught him;
On alehouse benches
 His cage had been,
While louts and wenches
 Made jests obscene.—
But he learn'd, no doubt,
 His oaths from fellows
Who travel about
 With kettle and bellows.

And three or four,
    The roundest by far
That ever he swore,
    Were taught by a tar.
And the tailor heard—
    "We'll be friends!" said he,
"You're a clever bird,
    And our tastes agree—
We both are old,
    And esteem life base,
The whole world cold,
    Things out of place,
And we're lonely too,
    And full of care—
So what can we do
    But swear?

IV.

"The devil take you,
    How you mutter!—
Yet there's much to make you
    Swear and flutter.

You want the fresh air
    And the sunlight, lad,
And your prison there
    Feels dreary and sad,
And here I frown
    In a prison as dreary,
Hating the town,
    And feeling weary:
We 're too confined, Jack,
    And we want to fly,
And you blame mankind, Jack,
    And so do I!
And then, again,
    By chance as it were,
We learn'd from men
    How to grumble and swear;
You let your throat
    By the scamps be guided,
And swore by rote—
    All just as I did!
And without beseeching,
    Relief is brought us—
For we turn the teaching
    On those who taught us!"

V.

A haggard and ruffled
    Old fellow was Jack,
With a grim face muffled
    In ragged black,
And his coat was rusty
    And never neat,
And his wings were dusty
    From the dismal street,
And he sidelong peer'd,
    With eyes of soot too,
And scowl'd and sneer'd,—
    And was lame of a foot too!
And he long'd to go
    From whence he came;—
And the tailor, you know,
    Was just the same.

VI.

All kinds of weather
    They felt confined,

And swore together
    At all mankind;
For their mirth was done,
    And they felt like brothers,
And the swearing of one
    Meant no more than the other's;
'Twas just a way
    They had learn'd, you see,—
Each wanted to say
    Only this—"Woe 's me!
I 'm a poor old fellow,
    And I 'm prison'd so,
While the sun shines mellow,
And the corn waves yellow,
    And the fresh winds blow,—
And the folk don't care
    If I live or die,
But I long for air,
    And I wish to fly!"
Yet unable to utter it,
    And too wild to bear,
They could only mutter it,
    And swear.

VII.

Many a year
    They dwelt in the city,
In their prisons drear,
    And none felt pity,
And few were sparing
    Of censure and coldness,
To hear them swearing
    With such plain boldness;
But at last, by the Lord,
    Their noise was stopt,—
For down on his board
    The tailor dropt,
And they found him dead,
    And done with snarling,
And over his head
    Still grumbled the Starling;
But when an old Jew
    Claim'd the goods of the tailor,
And with eye askew
    Eyed the feathery railer,
And, with a frown
    At the dirt and rust,

Took the old cage down,
    In a shower of dust,—
Jack, with heart aching,
    Felt life past bearing,
And shivering, quaking,
All hope forsaking,
    Died swearing.

IV.

JANE LEWSON.

Clasping his knee with one soft lady-hand,
  The other fingering his glass of wine,
Black-raimented, white-hair'd, polite, and bland,
  With mellow voice discourses Doctor Vine:
He warms, with deep eyes stirr'd to thoughtful light,
  And round about his serious talk the while,
Kindly, yet pensive—worldly wise, yet bright,
  Like bloom upon the blackthorn blows his smile.

JANE LEWSON.

AH, strong and mighty are we mortal men!
Braving the whirlwind on a ship at sea,
Facing the grim fort's hundred tongues of fire,
Ay, and in England, 'neath the olive branch,
Pushing a stubborn elbow through the crowd,
To get among the heights that keep the gold;
But there is might and might,—and in the one
Our dames and daughters shame us. Come, my friend,
My man of sinew,—conscious of your strength,
Proud of your well-won wrestles with the world,—
Hear what a feeble nature can endure!

A little yellow woman, dress'd in black,
With weary crow's-feet crawling round the eyes,

And solemn voice, that seem'd a call to prayer;
Another yellow woman, dress'd in black,
Sad, too, and solemn, yet with bitterness
Burn'd in upon the edges of her lips,
And sharper, thinner, less monotonous voice;
And last, a little woman auburn-hair'd,
Pensive a little, but not solemnised,
And pretty, with the open azure eyes,
The white soft cheek, the little mindless mouth,
The drooping childish languor. There they dwelt,
In a great dwelling of a smoky square
In Islington, named by their pious friends,
And the lean Calvinistic minister—
The Misses Lewson, and their sister Jane.

Miss Sarah, in her twenty-seventh year,
Knew not the warmer passions of her sex,
But groan'd both day and night to save her soul;
Miss Susan, two years younger, had regrets
Her sister knew not, and a secret pain
Because her heart was withering—whence her tongue
Could peal full sharp at times, and show a sting;
But Jane was comely—might have cherish'd hopes,

Since she was only twenty, had her mind
Been hopefuller. The elders ruled the house.
Obedience and meekness to their will
Was a familiar habit Jane had learn'd
Full early, and had fitted to her life
So closely, 'twas a portion of her needs.
She gazed on them, as Eastern worshippers
Gaze on a rayless picture of the sun.
Her acts seem'd other than her own; her heart
Kept melancholy time to theirs; her eyes
Look'd ever unto them for help and light;
Her eyelids droop'd before them if they chid.
A woman weak and dull, yet fair of face!
Her mother, too, had been a comely thing—
A bright-hair'd child wed to an aged man,
A heart that broke because the man was hard,—
Not like the grim first wife, who brought the gold,
And yielded to his melancholy kiss
The melancholy virgins. Well, the three,
Alone in all the world, dwelt in the house
Their father left them, living by the rents
Of certain smaller houses of the poor.
And they were stern to wring their worldly dues—
Not charitable, since the world was base,

But cold to all men, save the minister,
Who weekly cast the darkness of his blessing
Over their chilly table.

All around
The life of London shifted like a cloud,
Men sinned, and women fell, and children cried,
And Want went ragged up and down the lanes;
While the two hueless sisters dragg'd their chain
Self-woven, pinch'd their lives complexionless,
Keeping their feelings quiet, hard, and pure.
But Jane felt lonesome in the world; and oft,
Pausing amid her work, gazed sadly forth
Upon the dismal square of wither'd trees,
The dusty grass that grew within the rails,
The garden-plots where here and there a flower
Grew up, and sicken'd in the smoke, and died;
And when the sun was on the square, and sounds
Came from the children in the neighbouring streets,
She thought of happy homes among the fields,
And brighter faces. When she walk'd abroad,
The busy hum of life oppress'd her heart
And frighten'd her: she did not raise her eyes,
But stole along,—a sweet shape clad in black,

A pale and pretty face, at which the men
Stared vacant admiration. Far too dull
To blame her gloomy sisters for the shape
Her young days took, she merely knew the world
Was drear; and if at times she dared to dream
Of things that made her colour come and go,
And dared to hope for cheerier, sunnier days,
She grew the wanner afterwards, and felt
Sad and ashamed. The dull life that she wore,
Like to a gloomy garment, day by day,
Was a familiar life, the only life
She clearly understood. Coldly she heard
The daily tale of human sin and wrong,
And the small thunders of the Sunday nights
In chapel. All around her were the streets,
And frightful sounds, and gloomy sunless faces.
And thus with tacit dolour she resign'd
Her nature to the hue upon the cheeks
Of her cold sisters. Yet she could not pray
As they pray'd, could not wholly feel and know
The blackness of mankind, her own heart's sin;
But when she tried to get to God, and yearn'd
For help not human, she could only cry,
Feeling a loveless and a useless thing,

Thinking of those sweet places in the fields,
Those homes whereon the sun shone pleasantly,
And happy mothers sat at cottage doors
Among their children.

Save for household work,
She would have wasted soon. From week to week
The burthen lay on her,—the gloomy twain
Being too busy searching for their souls,
And begging God above to spare the same.
Yet she was quiet thus, content and glad
To silent drudgery, such as saved her heart
From wilder flutterings. The Sabbath day
Was drearest: drest in burial black, she sat
Those solemn hours in chapel, listening,
And scarcely heeding what she heard, but watching
The folk around, their faces and their dress,
Or gazing at the sunshine on the floor;
And service over, idly pined at home,
And, looking from the window at the square,
Long'd for the labour of the coming day.
Her sisters watch'd her warily, be sure;
And though their hearts were pure as pure could be,
They loved her none the better for her face.

Love is as cunning as disease or death,
No doctor's skill will ward him off or cure,
And soon he found this pale and weary girl,
Despite the cloud of melancholy life
That rain'd around her. In no beauteous shape,
In guise of passionate stripling iris-eyed,
Such as our poets picture in their songs,
Love came;—but in the gloomy garb of one
Whom men call'd pious, and whose holy talk
Disarm'd the dragons. 'Twere but idle, friend,
To count the wiles by which he won his way
Into her heart; how she vouchsafed him all
The passion of a nature not too strong;
How, when the first wild sunshine dazzled her,
The woman loved so blindly, that her thoughts
Became a secret trouble in the house;
And how at last, with white and frighten'd face,
She glided out into the dark one night,
And vanish'd with no utterance of farewell.

The sisters gave a quick and scandall'd cry,
And sought a little for the poor flown bird;
Then, thinking awful things, composed their hearts
In silence, pinch'd their narrow natures more,

And waited. "This is something strange," they thought,
"Which God will clear; we will not think the worst,
Although she was a thing as light as straw."
Nor did they cry their fear among their friends,
Hawking a secret shame, but calmly waited,
Trusting no stain would fall upon their chill
And frosty reputations. Weeks pass'd by;
They pray'd, they fasted, yellowing more and more,
They waited sternly for the end, and heard
The timid knock come to the door at last.

It was a dark and rainy night; the streets
Were gleaming watery underneath the lamps,
The dismal wind scream'd fitfully without,
And made within a melancholy sound;
And the faint knock came to the door at last.
The sisters look'd in one another's faces,
And knew the wanderer had return'd again,
But spoke not; and the younger sister rose,
Open'd the door, peer'd out into the rain,
And saw the weary figure shivering there,
Holding a burthen underneath her shawl.
And silently, with wan and timid look,
The wanderer slipt in. No word of greeting

Spake either of the sisters, but their eyes
Gleam'd sharply, and they waited. White and cold,
Her sweet face feebly begging for a word,
Her long hair dripping loose and wet, stood Jane
Before them, shivering, clasping tight her load,
In the dull parlour with the cheerless fire.
Till Susan, pointing, cried in a shrill voice,
"What are you carrying underneath your shawl,
Jane Lewson?" and the faint despairing voice,
While the rain murmur'd and the night-wind blew,
Moan'd, "It's my *Baby!*" and could say no more,
For the wild sisters scream'd and raised their hands,
And Jane fell quivering down upon her knees,
The old shawl opening show'd a child asleep,
And, trebling terror with a piteous cry,
The child awaken'd.

Pointing to the door,
With twitching lips of venom, Susan said—
"Go!" and the elder sister echo'd her
More sadly and more solemnly. But Jane,
Clinging to Sarah's skirts, implored and moan'd,
"Don't turn me out! my little girl will die!
I have no home in all the world but here;

Kill me, but do not drive me from the house!"
"Jane Lewson," Susan cried, as white as death,
"Where is the father of this child?" and Jane
Moan'd, "Gone, gone, gone;" and when she named
his name,
And how, while she who spake in sickness lay,
He secretly had fled across the seas,
They shiver'd to the hair. Holding her hand
Upon her heart, the elder sister spake
In dull monotonous voice—"Look up! look up!
Perhaps 'tis not so ill as we believed.
Are you a wedded woman?" The reply
Was silentness and heavy drooping eyes,
Yet with no blush around the quivering lids;
And Sarah, freezing into ice, spake on
In dull monotonous voice—"Your sin has brought
Shame on us all, but they who make their beds
Must sleep upon them; go away, bad woman!
The third of what our father left is yours,
But you are not our sister any more."
Still moaning, shuddering, the girl begg'd on,
Nor ceased to rock the babe and still its cries,
"Kill me, but do not drive me from the house!
Put any pain upon me that you please,

But do not, do not, drive me forth again
Into the dreadful world! I have no friends
On all the earth save you!" The sisters look'd
At one another, and without a word
Walk'd from the room.

Jane sat upon the floor,
Soothing the child, and did not rise, but waited;
The agony and terror dried her tears,
And she could only listen, praying God
That He would soften them; and the little one
Look'd in her face and laugh'd.

A weary hour
Pass'd by, and then, still white, and stern, and cold,
The sisters enter'd, and the elder one
Spake without prelude: "We have talk'd it o'er,
Jane Lewson, and have settled how to act;
You have a claim upon us: will you take
The third of what our father left, and find
Another home?" But Jane cried, "Do not, do not,
Drive me away; I have no friends save you;
And I am sorry." Trembling, for her heart
Was not all cold, the elder icicle

Resumed: "Take what is left you, and be gone,
And never see our faces any more;
Or if you will, stay with us here, but only
On these conditions: For the infant's sake,
And for the sake of our good name, our friends
Must never know the miserable child
Is yours; but we will have it given out
That, being lonely and unwedded here,
We have adopted a poor tenant's child,
With view to bring it up in godliness."
Jane answer'd, with a feeble thrill of hope,
"Anything, anything,—only leave me not
Alone in the dark world." "Peace!" Susan said,
"You do not understand: the child herself
Must never know Jane Lewson is her mother:
Neither by word nor look nor tender folly,
Must you reveal unto the child her shame,
And yours, and ours!" Then, with a bitter cry,
And a wild look, Jane cried, "And must my babe
Not know me?" "Never," Sarah Lewson said:
"For the babe's sake, for yours, for ours, the shame
Must not be utter'd. See, you have your choice:
Take what our father gave you, and depart,
Or stay on these conditions. We are firm.

We have decided kindly, not forgetting
You were our sister, nor that this poor child
Is blameless, save that all the flesh is sin,
But not forgetting, either, what we owe
To God above us." Weeping o'er the child,
Not rising yet, Jane answer'd, "I will stay;
Yes, gladly, for the little baby's sake,
That folk may never call it cruel names."
And the stern sisters took from off the shelf
The great old Bible, placed it in her hands
And made her kiss it, swearing before God
Never to any one in all the world,
Not even to the child itself, to tell
She was its sinful mother. Wild and dazed,
She sware upon the Word. "That is enough."
Said Sarah; "but, Jane Lewson, never again
Speak to us of the evil that has pass'd;
Live with us as you used to do, and ask
The grace of God, who has been kinder far
Than you deserved."

Thus, friend, these icicles
Dealt their hard measure, deeming that they did
A virtuous and a righteous deed; and Jane,

The worn and mindless woman, sank again
Into submission and house-drudgery,
Comforted that she daily saw her child,
And that her shame was hidden from the world,
And that the child would never suffer scorn
Because a sinner bore it. But her heart
Was a bruised reed, the little sunny hue
Had gone from all things; and whene'er she pray'd,
She thought the great cold God above her head
Dwelt on a frosty throne and did not hear.

II.

YET He, the Almighty Lord of this our breath,
Did see and hear, and surely pitied too,
If God can pity,—but He works as God,
Not man, and so we cannot understand.

No whisper of reproach, no spoken word.
Troubled with memories of her sinfulness
The suffering woman; yet her daily life
Became a quiet sorrow. In the house
She labour'd with her hands from morn to night,
Seeing few faces save the pensive ones
Whose yellow holiness she bow'd before;
And tacitly they suffer'd her to sink
Into the household drudge,—with privilege
Upon the Sabbath day to dress in black,
Sit in the sunless house or go to prayer,—

So idle, that her thoughts could travel back
To shame and bitterness. Her only joy
Was when she gave her little girl the breast,
(They dared not rob her weary heart of that,)
When, seated all alone, she felt it suck,
And, as the little lips drew forth the milk,
Felt drowsily resign'd, and closed her eyes,
And trembled, and could feel the happy tears.

There came a quiet gathering in the house,
And by the gloomy minister the child
Was christen'd; and the name he gave to her
Was "Margaret Lewson." For the sisters said,
"Her mother being buried, as it were,
The girl shall take our name." And Jane sat by,
And heard the pious lie with aching heart,
And ever after that her trouble grew.

Soon, when the sound of little feet were heard
In the dull dwelling, and a baby-voice
Call'd at the mother's heart, Jane thrill'd and heard,
But even as she listen'd the sweet sounds
Would seem to die into the cloud that hid
The great cold God above her. Margaret

Grew to a little wildling, quick and bright,
Black-eyed, black-hair'd, and passionate and quick,
Not like its mother; fierce and wild when chid,
So that the gloomy sisters often thought,
"There is a curse upon it;" yet they grew
To love the little wildling unaware,
Indulged it in their stern and solemn way,
More cheer'd than they believed by its shrill laugh
Within the dismal dwelling. But the child
Clung most to Jane, and though, when first it learn'd
To call her by her Christian name, the sound
Bruised the poor suffering heart, that wore away;
And all the little troubles of the child,
The pretty joys, the peevish fits, the bursts
Of passion, work'd upon her nature so,
That all her comfort was to snatch it up,
And cover it with kisses secretly.
Wilful and passionate, yet loving too,
Grew Margaret,—an echo in a cave
Of human life without; clinging to Jane,
Who never had the heart to fondle it
Before her sisters; not afraid at times
To pinch the thin, worn arms, or pull the hairs
Upon the aching head, but afterwards

Curing the pain with kisses and with tears.
So that as time wore on the mother's heart
Grew tenderer to its trouble than before.

Then later, when the little girl went forth
To school hard by, the motion and the light
Hied from the house; and all the morning hours
The thin face came and went against the panes,
Looking out townward,—till the little shape
Appear'd out of the cloud, and pale eyes grew
Dim to its coming. As the years went on,
The mother, with the agony in her heart
She could not utter, quietly subdued
Her nature to a listening watchfulness:
Her face grew settled to expectant calm,
Her vision penetrated things around
And gazed at something lying far beyond,
Her very foot linger'd about the house,
As if she loiter'd hearkening for a sound
Out of the world. For Margaret, as she grew,
Was wilder and more wilful, openly
Master'd the gloomy virgins, and escaped
The pious atmosphere they daily breathed
To gambol in a freer, fresher air;

And Jane would think, "'Twill kill me, if my child
Should turn out wicked." Mindless though she was,
And feeble, yet the trouble made her sense
Quick, sharp, and subtle to perceive and watch.
A little word upon the girlish tongue
Could sting her,—nay, a light upon the face,
A kindling of the eye, a look the child
Wore when asleep, would trouble her for days,
Carrying strangest import. So she waited,
Watching and listening,—while the young new life
Drew in the air, and throve, absorbing hues
Out of a thousand trivial lights and shades
That hover'd lightly round it. Still to Jane
The habit of submission clung: she watch'd
The wiser sterner faces oftentimes,
Trembling for confirmation of her fears;
And nightly pray'd that God, who was so just,
So hard to those who went astray at all,
Would aid her sisters, helping them to make
The little Margaret better as she grew,—
Waking her secret trouble evermore
With countless, nameless acts of help and love,
And humble admonition,—comforted
By secret fondlings of the little arms,

Or kisses on the tiny, wilful mouth
Apart in childish slumber.

Thus the years
Pass'd over her like pensive clouds, and melted
Into that dewy glamour on the brain,
Which men call Memory. Wherefore recount
The little joys and sorrows of the time:
The hours when sickness came, and thought itself
Tick'd like a death-watch,—all the daily hopes
And impulses and fears? Enough to tell,
That all went onward like a troubled stream,
Until the sisters, worn and growing old,
Felt the still angel coming nearer, nearer,
Scattering sleep-dust on uplooking eyes;
And Jane, though in her prime, was turning gray;
And Margaret was a maiden flower full-blown.

A passion-flower!—a maiden whose rich heart
Burn'd with intensest fire that turn'd the light
Of the sweet eyes into a warm dark dew;
One of those shapes so marvellously made,
Strung so intensely, that a finger-press,
The dropping of a stray curl unaware

Upon the naked breast, a look, a tone,
Can vibrate to the very roots of life,
And draw from out the spirit light that seems
To scorch the tender cheeks it shines upon;
A nature running o'er with ecstasy
Of very being, an appalling splendour
Of animal sensation, loveliness
Like to the dazzling panther's; yet, withal,
The gentle, wilful, clinging sense of love,
Which makes a virgin's soul. It seem'd, indeed,
The gloomy dwelling and the dismal days,
Gloaming upon her heart, had lent this show
Of shining life a melancholy shade
That trebled it in beauty. Such a heart
Needed no busy world to make it beat:
It could throb burningly in solitude;
Since kindly Heaven gave it strength enough
To rock the languid blood into the brains
Of twenty smaller natures.

Then the pain,
The wonder, deepen'd on the mother's heart,—
Her mother, her worn mother, whom she knew not
To be her mother. As she might have watch'd

A wondrous spirit from another world,
Jane Lewson watch'd her child. Could this fair girl,—
This wild and dazzling life, be born of *her*?—
A lightning flash struck from a pensive cloud
The wan still moon is drinking? Like a woman
Who has been sick in darkness many days,
And steps into the sunshine, Jane beheld
Her daughter, and felt blind. A terror grew
Upon her, that the smother'd sense of pride
Lack'd power to kill. She pray'd, she wept, she dream'd,
And thought, if Margaret's had been a face
More like the common faces of the streets,
'Twould have been better. With this feeling, grew
The sense of her own secret. Oftentimes
A look from Margaret brought the feeble blush
Into the bloodless cheek;—creeping away
Into her chamber, Jane would wring her hands,
Moaning in pain, "God help me! If she knew!
Ah, if she knew!" And then for many days
Would haunt the dwelling fearfully, afraid
To look on what she loved,—till once again,
Some little kindness, some sweet look or tone,

A happy kiss, would bring her courage back
And cheer her.

Nor had Margaret fail'd to win
The hard-won sisters; oft their frosty eyes
Enlarged themselves upon her and grew thaw'd—
In secret she was mistress over both—
And in their loveless way, they also felt
A frighten'd pleasure in the beauteous thing
That brighten'd the dull dwelling.

Oftentimes,
The fiery maiden-nature flashing forth
In wilful act or speech or evil looks,
Deepen'd Jane's terror. Margaret heeded not
The sisters' pious teachings, did not show
A godly inclination,—nay, at times
Mock'd openly. Ah, had she guess'd the pain,
The fear, the agony, such mockings gave
Her mother, her worn mother, whom she knew not
To be her mother! In her secret heart
Jane deem'd her own deep sorrows all had come
Because she had not, in her dreary youth,
Been godly; and as such flashes as she saw

Gleam from her girl, seem'd wicked things indeed;
And at such times the weary woman's eyes
Would seek the sunless faces, searching them
For cheer or warning.

In its season came
That light which takes from others what it gives
To him or her who, standing glorified,
Awaits it. 'Tis the old, sad mystery:
No gift of love that comes upon a life
But means another's loss. The new sweet joy,
That play'd in tender colours and mild fire
On Margaret's cheek, upon the mother's heart
Fell like a firebrand.

For to Jane, her friend,
Her dearest in the household from the first,
Her mother, her worn mother, whom she knew not
To be her mother, Margaret first told
The terror—how she loved and was beloved;
And seated at Jane's feet, with eyes upturn'd,
Playing with the worn fingers, she exclaim'd,
"I love him, Jene! and you will love him too!
I will not marry any other man!"

And suddenly Jane felt as if the Lord
Had come behind her in the dark and breathed
A burning fire upon her. For she thought,
"My child will go away, and I shall die!"
But only murmur'd, "Marry, Margaret?
You are too young to marry!"——and her face
Was like a murder'd woman's.

And the pain,
The agony, deepen'd, when the lover's face
Came smiling to the dwelling, young and bright
With pitiless gladness. Jane was still, and moan'd,
"My child will go away, and I shall die!"
And look'd upon her sisters, and could see
They pitied her; but their stern faces said,
"This is God's will! the just God governs all!
How should we cross such love?" adding, "Beware,—
For our sakes, for your own, but chief of all
For her sake whom you love, remember now!
Pray, and be silent!" And the wounded heart
Cried up to God again, and from the sky
No answer came; when, crush'd beneath her pain,
The woman sicken'd, lay upon her bed,
And thought her time was come.

Most tenderly
Her daughter nursed her; little fathoming
The meaning of the wild and yearning look
That made the white face sweet and beautiful;
For Jane was saying, "Lord! I want to die!
My child would leave me, or my useless life
Would turn a sorrow to her, if I stay'd:
Lord, let me die!" Yea, the dull nature clung
Still unto silence, with the still resolve
Of mightier natures. Thinking she would die,
Jane lay as in a painless dream, and watch'd
The bright face stir around her, following
The shape about the room, and praying still
For strength—so happy in her drowsy dream,
That she went chill at times, and felt that thoughts
So tranquil were a sin. A darker hour
Gloam'd soon upon her brain. She could not see
The face she loved; murmur'd delirious words;
And in the weary watches of the night,
Moaning and wringing hands, with closèd eyes,
Cried "Margaret! Margaret!" Then the sisters sought
To lead the girl away, lest she should hear
The secret; but she conquer'd, and remain'd;

And one still evening, when the quiet fire
Was making ghosts that quiver'd on the floor
To the faint time-piece ticking, Jane awoke,
Gazed long and strangely at the shining face,
Waved her thin arms, cried, "Margaret! Margaret!
Where are you, Margaret? Have you gone away?
Come to your mother!" The wild cry of pain
Startled the maiden, but she only thought
The fever'd woman raved. Twining her arms
Around Jane's neck, she murmur'd, "I am here!"
Weeping and kissing; but the woman sigh'd
And shiver'd, crying feebly, "Let me die!
My little girl has gone into the town,
And she has learn'd to call me wicked names,
And will not come again!"

When, wearied out,
Jane sank to troubled sleep, her child sat still,
Thinking of those strange words; and though at last
She shut them from her thought as idle dream,
Their pain return'd upon her. The next day
She spake unto the sisters of the same,
Adding, in a low voice, "She talk'd of me,
And moan'd out loudly for a little child—

Has she a child?" The first quick flash of fear
Died from the yellow visages unseen,
And they were calm. "Delirium!" Sarah said;
"But you, my child, must watch her sick-bed
less—
You are too young, too weak, to bear such things."
And this time Margaret did not say a word,
But yielded, thinking, "It is very strange!—
There is a mystery, and I will watch:
Can Jane have had a child?"

That very day
The dark mists roll'd from the sick woman's brain,
And she awoke, remembering nought, and saw
The sisters watching her. Two days they watch'd;
And spake but very little, though they saw
The wan eyes wander with a hungry look,
Seeking the face they loved. Then Sarah took
Jane's hand, and spake more gently, sisterly,
(Such natures, friend, grow kinder as they age,)
Than she had done for many years, and told
Of those wild words utter'd while she was ill;
Jane moan'd and hid her face; but Sarah said,
"We do not blame you, and perchance the Lord

Spake through you! We have thought it o'er, and
pray'd:
Now listen, Jane. Since that unhappy night,
We have not spoken of your shame, yet know
You have repented." With her face still hid,
Jane falter'd, "Let me die!" but Sarah said,
"We do not think, Jane Lewson, you will live;
So mark me well. If, ere you go away,
You feel that you could go more cheerfully,
If you are certain that it is not sin,
Poor Margaret shall know she is your child;
We will not, now you die, deny you this;
And Margaret will be silent of the shame,—
And, lest you break your oath upon the Word,
Our lips shall tell her." Still Jane Lewson hid
Her face; and all was quiet in the room,
Save for a shivering sound and feeble crying.
But suddenly Jane lifted up her face,
Beauteous beyond all beauty given to joy,
And quickly whispering, press'd the chilly hand—
"I will not speak! I will not hurt my child
So cruelly!—the child shall never know!
And I will go in silence to my grave,
Leaving her happy,—and perhaps the Lord

Will pardon me!" Then, for the first last time,
The sisters look'd on Jane with different eyes,
Admiring sternly, with no words of praise,
Her they had scorn'd for feebleness so long.

Even then the watchers in the chamber heard
A sound that thrill'd them through,—a rustling dress,
A deep hard breathing as of one in pain;
And pointing with her hand Jane scream'd aloud;
And turning suddenly the sisters saw
A face as white as marble, yet illumed
By great eyes flashing with a terrible flame
That made them quail. And in a dangerous voice,
As low as a snake's hissing, Margaret said,
"I have heard all!" Then the great eyes were turn'd
On Jane, and for a moment they were cold;
But all at once the breathless agony
Of recognition struck upon her heart,
The bosom heaved and moan'd, the bright tears burst,
And Margaret flung herself upon the bed,
Clasping her shivering mother; and at first
Jane shrank away,—but soon the wondrous love
Master'd her,—she could smile and kiss and cry—

And hear the dear wild voice cry, "Mother! mother!"
And see the bright face through her tears, and feel
That Love was there.

After the first strange bliss
Of meeting, both were stiller. Jane could weep,
And bear to feel so happy. Margaret
Clang to her mother, breathed her bliss upon her,
Fondling the silver'd tresses, covering
The thin hard hand with kisses and with tears,
Trying to say a thousand merry things
That died in sobs and tears, and only saying,
For all the utterance of her speechful heart,
"Mother! my mother!" Suddenly her shame
Came back upon the woman, and she turn'd
To seek her sisters' faces piteously,
But they had stolen from the happy room;
Whereon again she murmur'd, "Let me die!
I am a wicked woman, Margaret!
Why did you listen?" But a second burst
Of love and blissful pain, and bitter things
Hurl'd at the cruel sisters, answer'd her;
And more tears flow'd, and more fond kisses brush'd
The tears away,—until at last Jane cried,

"Dear, I could go away not weeping now—
God is so gentle with me!"

But He, who drew
Thus from His cloud at last and look'd so kind,
Will'd that Jane Lewson should not die so soon.
The agony did not kill her, and the joy
Sent a fresh life into her languid blood
And saved her. So that soon she rose from bed,
To see the sunshine on her daughter's face,
To see the sunless sisters, who again
Look'd cold as ever.

But a burning fire
From Margaret scorch'd them to the heart, because
They loved the girl; she heap'd upon their heads
Rage and reproaches, mockery and scorn,
Until they cried, "You are a wicked girl!
Jane Lewson's shame is on you. After this
We cannot dwell together any more."
And Margaret would have answer'd fiercelier still,
But that her feeble mother, piteously
Gazing at them to whom in spite of all
Her heart was humble, begg'd her on her knees

For silence; and, thus conquer'd, Margaret
Answer'd her aunts with kisses and with tears
Shower'd on her mother's face.

That evening,
Margaret held her mother round the neck,
And led her to her lover in the house,
And with her lips set firm together, saying,
"This is my dear, dear mother," told him all,
Concealing nothing. For a time, the man
Look'd startled and appall'd; but being made
Of clay not base, he smiling spake at last,
And stooping softly, kiss'd the thin worn hand—
"She is my mother, too,—and we will dwell
Together!"

And they dwelt together,—leaving
The dismal dwelling in the smoky square,
To dwell within a cottage close to town;
But Jane lived with them only for a year,
And then, because the heart that had been used
To suffering so long could not endure
To be so happy, died; worn out and tired,
Kissing her child; and as her dying thoughts

Went back along the years, the suffering seem'd
Not such a thankless suffering after all,
But like a faded garment one has learn'd
To love through habit ;—and the woman cried
On her stern sisters with her dying breath.

V.

LANGLEY LANE:

A Love Poem.

LANGLEY LANE.

IN all the land, range up, range down,
  Is there ever a place so pleasant and sweet,
As Langley Lane, in London town,
  Just out of the bustle of square and street?
Little white cottages, all in a row,
Gardens, where bachelors'-buttons grow,
  Swallows' nests in roof and wall,
And up above the still blue sky,
Where the woolly-white clouds go sailing by,—
  I seem to be able to see it all!

For now, in summer, I take my chair,
  And sit outside in the sun, and hear
The distant murmur of street and square,
  And the swallows and sparrows chirping near;

And Fanny, who lives just over the way,
Comes running many a time each day,
With her little hand's-touch so warm and kind;
And I smile and talk, with the sun on my cheek,
And the little live hand seems to stir and speak,—
For Fanny is dumb and I am blind.

Fanny is sweet thirteen, and she
Has fine black ringlets, and dark eyes clear,
And I am older by summers three,—
Why should we hold one another so dear?
Because she cannot utter a word,
Nor hear the music of bee or bird,
The water-cart's splash, or the milkman's call.
Because I have never seen the sky,
Nor the little singers that hum and fly,—
Yet know she is gazing upon them all.

For the sun is shining, the swallows fly,
The bees and the blue-flies murmur low,
And I hear the water-cart go by,
With its cool splash-splash down the dusty row;
And the little one close at my side, perceives
Mine eyes upraised to the cottage eaves,

Where birds are chirping in summer shine,
And I hear, though I cannot look, and she,
Though she cannot hear, can the singers see,—
And the little soft fingers flutter in mine.

Hath not the dear little hand a tongue,
When it stirs on my palm for the love of me?
Do I not know she is pretty and young?
Hath not my soul an eye to see?
'Tis pleasure to make one's bosom stir,
To wonder how things appear to her,
That I only hear as they pass around;
And as long as we sit in the music and light,
She is happy to keep God's sight,
And *I* am happy to keep God's sound.

Why, I know her face, though I am blind—
I made it of music long ago:
Strange large eyes, and dark hair twined
Round the pensive light of a brow of snow;
And when I sit by my little one,
And hold her hand, and talk in the sun,
And hear the music that haunts the place,
I know she is raising her eyes to me,

And guessing how gentle my voice must be,
  And *seeing* the music upon my face.

Though, if ever Lord God should grant me a prayer,
  (I know the fancy is only vain,)
I should pray: Just once, when the weather is fair,
  To see little Fanny and Langley Lane;
Though Fanny, perhaps, would pray to hear
The voice of the friend that she holds so dear,
  The song of the birds, the hum of the street,—
It is better to be as we have been,—
Each keeping up something, unheard, unseen,
  To make God's heaven more strange and sweet.

Ah! life is pleasant in Langley Lane!
  There is always something sweet to hear;
Chirping of birds, or patter of rain;
  And Fanny, my little one, always near;
And though I am weak, and cannot live long,
And Fanny, my darling, is far from strong,
  And though we can never married be,—
What then?—since we hold one another so dear,
For the sake of the pleasure one cannot hear,
  And the pleasure that only one can see?

VI.

EDWARD CROWHURST;

OR, "A NEW POET."

EDWARD CROWHURST.

I.

Potts, in his dusty chamber, writes,
A dilettante lord to please:
A ray of country sunshine lights
The foggy region ruled by these;
Flock, kind advisers, critics sage,
To damn the simple country clown,—
The mud of English patronage
Grows round his feet, and keeps him down.

"THIS little mean-faced duodecimo,
'Poems by Edward Crowhurst, Labourer.'
This coarsely-printed little book of rhymes,
Contains within the goodliest gift of song
The gods have graced us with for many a day:
A crystal clearness, as of running brooks.

A music, as of green boughs murmuring,
A peeping of fresh thoughts in shady places
Like violets new-blown, a gleam of dewdrops,
A sober, settled, greenness of repose,—
And lying over all, in level beams,
Transparent, sweet, and unmistakable,
The light that never was on sea or land.

" Let all the greater and the lesser lights
Regard these lines upon a Wood in Spring,
Or those which follow, call'd ' the Barley-Bird,'
And then regard their laurels. Melody
More sweet was never blown through pastoral pipe
In Britain, since the Scottish Ramsay died.
Nor let the squeamish dreamers of our time,
Our rainbow bards, despise such song as this,
Wealthy in images the poor man knows,
And household chords that make the women weep.
Simply yet subtly, Edward Crowhurst works:
Singing of lowly truths and homely things—
Death snatching up a cotter's child at play,
Light flashing from far worlds on dying eyes
That never saw beyond their native fields,
The pathos and the power of common life;

And while, perchance, his deeper vein runs on
Less heeded, by a random touch is waken'd
A scent, a flowër-tint, a wave of wings,
A sense of rustling boughs and running brooks,
Touch'd by whose spell the soul is stirr'd, and eyes
Gaze on the dark world round them, and are dim.

"This Mister Crowhurst is a poor young man,
Uneducated, doom'd to earn his bread
By working daily at the plough; and yet,
Sometimes in midst of toil, sometimes at night,
Whenever he could snatch a little time,
Hath written down (he taught himself to write!)
His simple verses. Is it meet, we ask,
A nature so superb should languish thus?
Nay, he deserves, if ever man deserved,
The succour of the rich and high in place,
The opportunity to labour less,
And use those truly wondrous gifts of his
In modest competence; and therewithal,
Kindness, encouragement, and good advice,
Such as the cultured give. Even now, we hear,
A certain sum of money is subscribed,
Enough to furnish well his present needs.

Among the donors, named for honour here,
We note the noble Earl of Chremiton,
Lord Phidippus, Lord Gnathos, Lady Dee,
Sir Charles Toroon. But more must yet be done.
We dare to put the case on public grounds,
Since he who writes so nobly is, indeed,
A public benefactor,—with a claim
On all who love to listen and to look,
When the fresh Saxon Muse, in homespun gear,
The free breeze blowing back her loosen'd hair,
Wanders barefooted through the dewy lanes
And sings aloud, while all the valleys ring
For pleasure, and the echoes of the hills
Make sweet accord!"

—*Conservative Review.*

EDWARD CROWHURST.

II.

AFTER TEN YEARS.

A homely matron, who has once been fair,
  In quiet suffering old, yet young in years;
Soft threads of silver in her auburn hair,
  And lines around the eyes that tell of tears;
But on her face there trembles peaceful light,
That seems a smile, and yet is far less bright,—
To tell of watchings in the shade and sun,
And melancholy duty sweetly done.

WHAT, take away my Teddy? shut him up
    Between stone walls, as if he were a thief?
You freeze my blood to talk of such a thing!
Why, these green fields where my old man was born,

The river, and the woodland, and the lanes,
Are all that keep him living: he was ever
O'er fond of things like those; and now, you see,
Is fonder of them than he was before,
Because he thinks so little else is left.
Mad? He's a baby! Would not hurt a fly!
Can manage him as easy as our girl!
And though he was a poet and went wrong,
He could not help his failings. Ah, True Heart,
I love him all the deeper and the dearer!
I would not lose him for the whole wide world!

It came through working lonely in the fields,
And growing shy of cheerful company,
And worrying his wits with idle things
He saw and heard when quiet out o' doors.
For, long ere we were wedded, all the place
Knew Teddy's ways: how mad he was for flowers
And singing birds; how often at the plough
He used to idle, holding up his head
And looking at the clouds; what curious stuff
He used to say about the ways of things;
How week-days he was never company,
Nor tidy on a Sunday. Even then

Folk call'd him stupid : so did I myself,
At first, before his sheepishness wore off;
And then, why I was frighten'd for a time
To find how wondrous brightly he could look
And talk, when with a girl, and no one by.
Right soon he stole this heart of mine away,
So cunningly I scarcely guess'd 'twas gone,
But found my tongue at work before I knew,
Sounding his praises. Mother shook her head;
But soon it was the common country talk
That he and I were courting.

After that
Some of his sayings and his doings still
Seem'd foolish, but I used to laugh and say,
"Wait till we marry! I shall make him change!"
And it was pleasant walking after dark,
In summer, wandering up and down the lanes,
And heark'ning to his talk; and pleasant, too,
In winter, to sit cuddling by the fire,
And whispering to the quiet firelight sound
And the slow ticking of the clock. Ere long,
I grew to care for many things he loved.
He knew the names of trees, and birds, and flowers,

Their races and their seasons; named the stars,
Their comings and their goings; and could tell
Strange truths about the manners of the clouds.
Set him before a hedgerow in a lane,
And he was happy all alone for hours.
The woods and fields were full of joy to him,
And wonders, and fine meanings ever new.
How, at the bottom of the wayside well,
The foul toad lies and purifies the drink;
How twice a year red robin sings a song,
Once when the orchis blows its bells in spring,
Once when the gold is on the slanted sheaves;
How late at night the common nightingale
Comes in the season of the barley-sowing,
Silently builds her nest among the boughs,
And then sings out just as the roses blow,
And it is sweet and pleasant in the moon.
Why, half his courtship lay in talk like that,
And, oh! the *way* he talk'd fill'd high my heart
With pleasure; but, o' quiet winter nights,
With wild bright eyes and voice that broke for joy,
He often read aloud from books of songs;
One I remember, that I liked the best,
A book of pictures and of love-tales, call'd

"The Seasons." I was young, and did not think:
I only felt 'twas fine. Yet now and then
I noticed more, and took a sober fit,
And tried to make him tidy in his clothes,
And could not, though I tried; and used to sigh
When mother mutter'd hints, as mothers will,
That he should work more hard and look ahead,
And save to furnish out a house for me. . . .
For Teddy smiled, poor lad, and work'd more hard,
But save . . . not he! Instead of laying by,
Making a nest to rear the young ones in,
He spent his hard-won cash in buying books,—
Much dusty lumber, torn and black and old,
Long sheets of ballads, bundles of old rhyme,—
And read them, one by one, at home o' nights,
Or out aloud to me, or at the plough.
I chid at first, but quickly held my tongue,
Because he look'd so grieved; and once he said,
With broken voice and dew-light in his eyes,
"Lass, I'm a puzzle to myself and you,
But take away the books, and I should die!"
His back went bare for books, his stomach starved
To buy them,—nay, he pawn'd his Jacket once,
To get a dreary string of solemn stuff

All about Eve and Adam. More and more
He slacken'd at his toil; and soon the lad,
Who turn'd the cleanest furrow, when he pleased,
Of all the ploughmen, let his work go spoil,
And fairly led an idle thriftless life
In the green woods and on the river side.

And then I found that he himself made verse
In secret,—verse about the birds and flowers,
Songs about lovers, rhymes about the stars,
Tales of queer doings in the village here,—
All writ on scraps of paper out-o'-doors,
And hidden in an old tin coffee-pot
Where he had kept his cash. The first I heard
Was just a song all about him and me,
And cuddling in the kitchen while 'twas snowing;
He read it to me, blushing like a girl,
And I was pleased, and laugh'd, and thought it fine,
And wonder'd where he learn'd to make the words
Jingle so sweetly. Then he read me more,
Some that I liked, some that I fancied poor;
And, last of all, one morn in harvest-time,
When all the men were working in the fields,
And he was nearly ragged, out it came—

"They 're reaping corn, and corn brings gold, my lass
But I will reap gold, too, and fame beside,—
I 'm going to print a Book!"

I thought him mad!
The words seem'd dreadful—such a fool was I;
And I was puzzled more when he explain'd:
That he had sent some verses by the post
To a rich man who lived by selling songs
Yonder in London city; that for months
No answer came, and Teddy strain'd his eyes
Into the clouds for comfort; that at last
There came a letter full of wondrous praise
From the great man in London, offering
Poor Teddy, if he sent him verse enough
To make a pretty little printed book,
To value it in money. Till I die,
I 'll ne'er forget the light on Teddy's face—
The light, the glory, and the wonder there:
He laugh'd, and read the letter out aloud,
He leapt and laugh'd and kiss'd me o'er and o'er,
And then he read the letter o'er again,
And then turn'd pale, and sank into a chair,
And hid his bright face in his hands, and cried.

Bewilder'd though I was, my heart was glad
To see his happy looks, and pleased beside
That fine folk call'd him clever. I said nought
To mother—for I knew her ways too well—
But waited. Soon came other wondrous news:
The scraps of verse had all been copied out
On fine white sheets, written in Teddy's hand,
Big, round, and clear, like print; and word had come
That they were read and praised by other folk,
Friends of the man in London. Last of all,
One night, when I was ironing the clothes,
And mother knitting sat beside the fire,
In Teddy came—as bright and fresh and gay
As a cock starling hopping from the nest
On May-day; and with laughing eyes he cried,
"Well, mother, when are Bess and I to wed?"
"Wed?" mother snapt, as sour as buttermilk,
"Wed? when the birds swim, and the fishes fly,
And the green trees grow bread and cheese and butter
For lazy loons that lie beneath and yawn!"
Then Teddy laugh'd aloud, and when I frown'd
And shook my head to warn him, laugh'd the more;
And, drawing out his leathern ploughman's pouch,

"See, mother, see!" he cried,—and in her lap
Pour'd thirty golden guineas!

At the first,
I scream'd, and mother look'd afraid to touch
The glittering gold,—and plain enough she said
The gold, she guess'd, was scarcely honest gain;
Then Teddy told her all about his book,
And how those golden guineas were the price
The great rich man in London put upon 't.
She shook her head the more; and when he read
The great man's letter, with its words of praise,
Look'd puzzled most of all; and in a dream,
Feeling the gold with her thin hand, she sat,
While Teddy, proud dew sparkling in his eyes,
Show'd me in print the little song he made
Of cuddling in the kitchen while 'twas snowing,—
"And, Bess," he cried, "the gold will stock a house,
But little 'tis I care about the gold:
This bit of printed verse is sweeter far
Than all the shining wealth of all the world!"
And lifted up the paper to his mouth
And kiss'd the print, then held it out at length
To look upon 't with sparkling, happy eyes,

And folded it and put it in his pouch,
As tenderly and carefully, I swear,
As if it were a note upon a bank
For wealth untold. Why linger o'er the tale?—
Though now my poor old man is weak and ill,
Sweet is the telling of his happy time.
The money stock'd a house, and in a month
We two were man and wife.

Teddy was proud
And happy,—busy finishing the book
That was his heart's delight; and as for me,
My thoughts were merry as a running brook,
For Teddy seem'd a wise man after all;
And it was spring-time, and our little home
Was hung with white clematis, porch and wall,
And wall-flower, candituft, and London pride,
All shining round a lilac bush in bloom,
Sweeten'd the little square of garden ground;
And cozy as a finch's mossy nest
Was all within: the little sleeping-room
And red-tiled kitchen; and, made snug and fine
By chairs and tables cut of bran-new deal,
The little parlour,—on the mantel-piece

Field-flowers and ferns and bird's-egg necklaces,
Two pretty pictures pasted on the walls,
(The portraits of one Milton and one Burns,)
And, in the corner Teddy loved the best,
Three shelves to keep the old, black, thumb-mark'd
books.

And if my heart had fever, lest the life
Begun so well was over-bright to last,
Teddy could cheer me; for he placed his arm
Around me, looking serious in his joy,
When we were wed three days; and "Bess," he said,
"The Lord above is very kind to me;
For He has given me this sweet place and you,
Adding the bliss of seeing soon in print
The verse I love so much." Then, kissing me,
"I have been thinking of it all," he said,
"Holpen a bit by lives of other folk,
Which I have read. Now, many men like me
Grow light o' head and let their labour go;
But men can't live by writing verses, Bess."
"Nay, nay," cried I, "'twere pity if they could,
For every man would try the easier task,
And who would reap the fields or grind the corn?"

And Teddy smiling, said, "'Tis so! 'tis so!
Pride shall not puff my wits, but all the day
I will toil happily in the fields I love;
And in the pleasant evenings 'twill be fine
To wander forth and see the world with you,
Or read out poems in the parlour here,
Or take a pen and write, for ease o' heart,
Not praise, not money." I was glad tenfold,—
Put all my fears aside, and trusted him,—
And well he kept his word.

Yet ill at ease,
Restless and eager, Teddy waited on,
Until the night a monster parcel came
From London: twelve brown volumes, all the same,
Wide-printed, thin, and on the foremost page,
"Poems by Edward Crowhurst, Labourer."
The happiest hour my Teddy ever knew!
He turn'd the volumes o'er, examined each,
Counted the sheets, counted the printed leaves,
Stared at his name in print, held out the page
At arm's length, feasting with his mouth and eyes.
I wonder'd at his joy, yet, spite o' me,
I shared it. 'Twas so catching. The old tale!

A little thing could make my Teddy's heart
Gay as a bunch of roses, while a great
Went by unheeded like a cannon-ball.
The glowworm is a little common grub,
Yet what a pretty gleam it often sheds;
And that same poor, small, common-looking book,
Set on our table, kept around its leaves
A light like sunshine.

When his joy grew cool,
Teddy took up a book to read it through;
And first he show'd me, next the foremost page,
A bit of writing called the "Author's Life,"
Made up of simple things my man had told—
How he was but a lowly labourer,
And how the green fields work'd upon his heart
To write about the pretty things he saw—
All put together by a clever man
In London. For a time he sat and read
In silence, looking happy with his eyes;
But suddenly he started up and groan'd,
Looking as black as bog-mud, while he flung
The book upon the table; and I gript
His arm, and ask'd what ail'd him. "Bess," he said,

"The joy o' this has all gone sudden sour.
All through the cruel meddling of a fool:
The story of my life is true enough,
Despite the fine-flown things the teller sticks
Around it—peacock's feathers stuck around
The nest of some plain song-bird; but the end
Is like the garlic-flower,—looks fine at first,
But stinks on peeping nearer. Bess, my lass,
I never begg'd a penny in my life,
I sought the help of no man, but could work.
What then? what then? O Bess, 'tis hard, 'tis hard!
They make me go a-begging, book in hand,
As if I were a gipsy of the lanes
Whistling for coppers at an alehouse door!"

I, too, was hurt, but tried to comfort him;
'Twas kindly meant, at least, I thought and said;
But Teddy clench'd his teeth, and sat him down,
And wrote, not rudely, but as if in grief,
To him in London. Till the answer came,
The printed poems cheer'd him, though the book
Had lost a scent that ne'er would come again;
And when the answer came, 'twas like the words
A mother murmurs to a silly child—

A smiling, pitying, quiet kind of tone,
That made him angrier than violent speech;
And at the end a melancholy hint
About ingratitude. Teddy must trust
In those who had his fortune most at heart,
Nor rashly turn his friends to enemies,
Nor meddle with the kindly schemes of those
Who knew the great world better far than he.
Oh, Teddy's eyes were dim with bitter dew!
"Begging is begging, and I never begg'd!
Shame on me if I ever take their gold!"
I coax'd him to be silent; and though soon
The bitter mood wore off, his gladness lost
The look of happy pride it wore of old.

'Twas happy, happy, in the little home,
And summer round about on wood and field,
And summer on the bit of garden ground.
But soon came news, like whiffs of colour'd smoke,
Blown to us thickly on the idle wind,
And smelling of the city. For the land
Was crying Teddy's praises! Every morn
Came papers full of things about the Book,
And letters full of cheer from distant folk;

And Teddy toil'd away, and tried his best
To keep his glad heart humble. Then, one day,
A smirking gentleman, with inky thumbs,
Call'd, chatted, pried with little fox's eyes
This way and that, and when he went away
He wrote a heap of lying scribble, styled
"A Summer Morning with the Labourer Bard!"
Then others came: some, mild young gentlemen,
Who chirp'd, and blush'd, and simper'd, and were gone;
Some, sallow ladies wearing spectacles,
And pale young misses, rolling languid eyes,
And pecking at the words my Teddy spake
Like sparrows picking seed; and, once or twice,
Fine merry gentlemen who talk'd no stuff,
But chatted sensibly of common things,
And made us feel at home. Ay, not a day
But Teddy must be sent for, from the fields,
To meet with fine-clad strangers from afar.
The village folk began to open eyes
And wonder, but were only more afraid
Of Teddy, gave him hard suspicious looks,
And shunn'd him out-o'-doors. Yet how they throng'd,
Buzzing like humble bees at swarming time,

That morn the oil'd and scented gentleman
(For such we thought him) brought a little note
From Lord Fitztalbot of Fitztalbot Tower,
Yonder across the moorland. 'Twas a line
Bidding my Teddy to the Tower, and he
Who brought it was the footman of my lord.
Well, Teddy went, was many hours away,
And then return'd with cat's-claws round his lips.
"See!" Teddy cried, and flung a little purse
Of money in my lap; and I, amazed,
Counted ten golden guineas in my palm,
Then gazed at Teddy, saw how pale he was,
And ask'd what ail'd him. "'Tis the money, lass,"
He answer'd, groaning deep. "He talk'd, and seem'd
Right kindly; ask'd about my home, and you;
Spoke of the poems, smiled, and bow'd farewell;
And, dropping that same money in my hat,
Bade me go dine below. I burn'd like fire,
Felt choking, yet was fearful to offend,
And took the money, as I might have took
A blazing cinder, bow'd, and came away.
O Lord! O Lord! this comes of yonder loon,
Who sent the book a-begging!" Then he talk'd—

How fiercely and how wildly, clenching hands:
"Was not a poet better than a lord?
Why should the cruel people use him so?
Why would the world not leave his home in peace?"
And last, he vow'd to send the money back.
But I, though shamed and troubled, thought him wrong,
And vow'd my lord was kind, and meant us well,
And won him o'er at last to keep the purse.
And ah! we found it useful very soon,
When I lay in, and had a dreadful time,
And brought our girl. Then Teddy put aside
All grief and anger; thought of us alone;
Forgot, or nearly, all the praise and blame
Of loveless strangers; and was proud and glad,
Making fond rhymes about the babe and me.

Ah! had the folk but let my man alone,
All would be happy now. He loved his work,
Because it kept him in the fields; he loved
The babe and me; and all he needed more,
To keep his heart content, was pen and ink,
And now and then a book. And as for praise,
He needed it no more than singing birds;

And as for money, why, he wanted none;
And as for prying strangers in the house,
They brought a clumsy painful sense of pride
That made him restless. He was ever shy
Of company—he loved to dream alone—
And the poor life that he had known so long
Was just the kind of life he suited best.
He look'd a fine straight man in homespun gear,
But ne'er seem'd easy in his Sunday coat.

What should his fine friends do at last, but write,
Bidding my man to London,—there to meet
A flock o' gentlefolk, who spent their days
In making books!—Though here we dwell so near,
That northward, far away, you see the sky
Black with the smoky breathing of the city,
We ne'er had wander'd far away from home,
Save once or twice, five miles to westward yonder,
To Kersey Fair. Well, Teddy fix'd to go;
And seeing him full bent, I held my tongue.
And off he set, one day, in Sunday black,
A hazel staff over his shoulder flung,
His bundle swinging,—and was sped by train
To London town. Two weeks he stay'd away;

And, when he came from London, he was changed.
His eyes look'd wild, his cheek was pale, his step
Unsteady; when he enter'd, I could smell
Drink in his breath. Full pain'd, and sick at heart,
I question'd him; but he was petulant,
And snapt me short; and when I brought the child,
He push'd her from him. Next day, when he rose,
His face was pallid; but his kindly smile
Came back upon it. Ere the day was out,
He told me of his doings, of the men
And places he had seen, and when, and how.
He had been dull in dwellings of the rich,
Had felt ashamed in great grand drawing-rooms,
And angry that the kindly people smiled
As if in pity; and the time, he said,
Would have gone drearily, had he lack'd the cheer
He chanced to find among some jovial folk
Who lived by making books. Full plain I saw
That something had gone wrong. His ways were strange,
He did not seem contented in his home,
He scarcely glinted at the poor old books
He loved so dearly. In a little time,
Teddy grew more himself, at home, a-field,

And though, from that day forward, he began
To take a glass and smoke a pipe at night,
I scarcely noticed. Thus the year wore on;
And still the papers praised him far away,
And still the letters came from distant folk.

And Teddy had made friends: folk who could talk
About the things he loved, and flatter him,
Ay, laugh aloud to see him drink his glass,
And clap his back, and shake him by the hand,
How wild soe'er he talk'd. For by degrees
His tongue grew freer, he was more at ease
With strangers. Oft he spent the evening hours
With merry-makers in the public-house,
And totter'd home with staring, dazzled eyes.
The country people liked him better now,
And loved to coax him out to drink at night,
And, gaping, heark'd to the strange things he said.
Ah, then my fear grew heavy, though his heart
Was kindly still, his head still clear and wise,
And he went wastering only now and then.

But soon his ways grew better, for his time
Was spent in finishing another book.

Yet then I found him changed in other things;
For once or twice when money as before
Was sent or given him, he only laugh'd,
And took it, not in anger. And, be sure,
Money grew needful in the little home—
Another babe was coming. Babe and book
Were born together, but the first was born
Quiet and breathless. 'Twould be idle talk
To speak about the book. What came of that,
Was much the same as what had come before:
The papers praised it over all the land,
But just a shade more coolly; strange folk wrote,
But not so oft. Yet Teddy was in glee,
For *this* time fifty golden guineas came
From the rich man in London.

Once again,
They coax'd him up to London; once again,
Home came he changed,—with wilder words of wit,
And sharper sayings, on his tongue. He toil'd
Even less than ever: nay, his idle friends,
Who loved to drain the bottle at his side,
Took up his time full sorely. We began
To want and pinch: more money was subscribed,

And taken :—till at last my man grew sick
Of working in the open fields at all.

And just as work grew hardest to his mind,
The Lord Fitztalbot pass'd him on the road,
And turn'd his head away. A change had come,
As dreadful as the change within himself.
The papers wrote the praise of newer men,
The strange folk sent him letters scarce at all;
And when he spake about another book,
The man in London wrote a hasty "No!"
And said the work had little chance to sell.
Those words were like a sunstroke. Wild and scared,
My Teddy stared at London—all his dreams
Came back upon him—and with bitter tongue
He mock'd and threaten'd. 'Twas of no avail!
His fine-day friends like swallows wing'd away,
The summer being o'er; the country folk
Began to knit their foreheads as of old,
Save one or two renown'd as ne'er-do-wells;
And, mad with pride, bitten with shame and fear,
Teddy drank deeper at the public-house.

Teddy to blame? Teddy to blame? Ah, nay!

The blame be theirs who broke his simple pride
With money, beggar'd him against his will.
The blame be theirs who flatter'd him from home,
And led him out to make his humble ways
An idle show. The blame be theirs who smiled
Whene'er he play'd a wrong and foolish part,
Because he had skill to write a bit of verse.
The blame be theirs who spoil'd him like a child,
And, when the newness of his face was gone,
Turn'd from him scornfully and smiled elsewhere.
Teddy to blame!—a silly, ignorant man,
Not learn'd, not wise, not cunning in the world!

But hearken how I changed him yet once more,
One day when he was sick and ill with pain.
I spake of all our early courting days,
Full low and tender, of the happy time
When I brought forth our girl, and of the words
He spake when we were happy; last of all,
"Teddy," I said, "let people be unkind,
The whole world hard, you cannot heal your pain
Wastering, idling; think of merrier days,
Of me, and of our girl, and drink no more."
He gazed at me full long, his bosom rose

And flutter'd, and he held my hand in his,
And shivering, moaning, sank into a chair;
And, looking at the bookshelf at his side,
And at the common-looking thumb-mark'd books,
He promised, promised, with his poor cheeks wet,
And his voice broken, and his lips set firm.

True Heart, he kept his word. The public-house
Knew him no longer; in the fields he toil'd
Lonely once more; and in the evenings
Read books and wrote,—and all he wrote, I know,
Was sad, sad, sad. Bravely he work'd all day,
But not so cheerfully. And no man cared
To brighten him with goodly words. His face
Was stale with gentlefolk, his heart too proud
To mix with coarse, low men. Oft in the fields
They saw him turn his poor eyes Londonwards,
And sigh; but he was silent of the pain
That grew upon him. Slowly he became
The sadden'd picture of his former self:
He stood at ploughtail looking at the clouds,
He watch'd the ways of birds and trees and flowers;
But all the little things he learn'd and loved
Had ta'en a sadder meaning. Oftentimes,

In spite of all he did to hide his heart,
I saw he would have been a happy man
If any one had praised him as of old;
But he was never sent for from the fields,
No strangers wrote to cheer him, and he seem'd
All, all, forgotten. Still, as true as steel,
He held his promise to our girl and me,
Though oft, I know, the dreadful longing came
To fly to drink for comfort. Then, one night,
I heard a stirring in the dark: our girl
Crept close to me, and whisper'd in mine ear—
"Hark! father's crying!"

O 'tis terrible
To hear a strong man weep! I could not bear
To find him grieving so, but crept unto him,
And put my arms about him, on his neck
Weeping, "O Teddy, Teddy, do not so!
Cheer up, for you will kill me if you cry.
What do you long for? Why are you so sad?"
And I could feel him crush his hot tears down,
And shake through every limb. "O lass!" he cried,
"I cannot give a name to what I want;
I cannot tell you why I grow so sad;

But I have lost the pleasure and the peace
The verses brought me. I am sick and changed,—
I think too much of other men,—I seem
Despised and useless. If I did not feel
You loved me so, and were so kind and true,
When all the world is cruel, I should fall
And wither. All my strength is gone away,
And I am broken!"

'Twas but little cheer
That I could give him: *that* was grief too deep
For foolish me to understand or cure.
I made the little parlour bright o' nights,
Coax'd him to read aloud the books he loved,
And often he was like himself again,
Singing for ease o' heart; and now and then,
A poem printed in a newspaper,
Or something kind from people in the world,
Help'd me a little. So the time wore on;—
Till suddenly, one night in winter time,
I saw him change. Home came he white and pale,
Shivering, trembling, looking wild and strange,
Yet speaking quietly. "My head feels queer—
It aches a bit!" he said; and the next day

He could not rise from bed. Quiet he lay,
But now and then I saw him raise his hand
And hold his forehead. In the afternoon,
He fell to troubled sleep, and, when he woke,
He did not seem to know me. Full of fear,
I sent for Doctor Barth. When Doctor came,
He found poor Teddy tossing on his bed,
Moaning and muttering and clenching teeth,
And Doctor said, "The ill is on the brain—
Has he been troubled lately?" and I cried,
"Ay, much, much troubled! He has fretted sore
For many months!"

'Twas sad, 'twas sad, to see
My strong man suffer on his dull sick-bed,
Not knowing me, but crying out of things
That haunted him. I will not weary you,
By telling how the Doctor brought him round,
And how at last he rose from bed, the ghost
Of his old self, and something gone away
That never would return. Then it was plain
That he could work no more: the Light had fled,
Which keeps a man a man despite the world
And all its cruel change. To fright the wolf,

I took in washing at the cottage here;
And people sent us money now and then,
And pitying letters reach'd us from the world,
Too late! too late!

Thank the good God above,
Who made me strong and willing, I could keep
The little house above us, though 'twas dear,
And ah! I work'd more hard because I knew
Poor Teddy's heart would break outright elsewhere.
Yet Teddy hardly seem'd to comprehend
All that had happen'd. Though he knew me well,
And spake full sensibly of many things,
He lack'd the power to speak of one thing long.
Sometimes he was as merry as a bird,
Singing wild songs he learn'd by heart when young;
Sometimes he wish'd to wander out a-field,
But easy 'twas to lead his wits away
To other things. And he was changeful ever,
Now laughing and now crying; and at times
He wrote strange notes to poets that were dead,
And named himself by all their names in turn,
Still making verse, which I had sense to see
Was wild, and strange, and wrong—not like the verse

He made of old. One day for hours he sat,
Looking upon the bit of garden ground,
And smiling. When I spoke, he look'd and laugh'd.
"Surely you know me, Teddy?" I exclaimed;
And up he raised his head, with shrill thin voice
Saying, "Yes, you are Queen Elizabeth,
And I am Shakespeare;" and again he smiled
Craftily to himself; but when I hung
Around his neck, and wept, and ask'd again,
He turn'd upon me with so pale a look,
So wan, so sharp, so full of agony,
'Twas clear the cloud was lifted for a moment,
'Twas clear he knew that he was Teddy Crowhurst,
And that the light of life had gone away.

And oft, in sunny weather, he and I
Had walks in quiet places,—in the lanes,
And in the woods, and by the river side;
And he was happy, prying as of old
In little mossy nests, or plucking flowers,
Or dropping pebbles at the water-brim,
To make the speckled minnows start and fly
In little gleams of light. Ne'er had he been
More cunning in the ways and looks of things,

Though memory fail'd him when he tried for names.
The sable streaks upon the arum-flower
Were strange to him as ever; a lark singing
Made his eyes misty as it used to do;
The shining sun, the waving of green boughs,
The rippling of the river down the dell,
Were still true pleasure. All the seasons brought
Something to charm him. Staring on the snow,
Or making great snow-houses like a boy,
He was as busy when the boughs were bare,
As carrying home a bough of scented May
Or bunch of yellow lilies from the pond.
What had been pleasure in his younger days
Came back to keep him quiet in the world.
He gave much love to trees and birds and flowers,
And, when the mighty world was all unkind,
The little, gentle, speechless things were true.

True Heart, I never thought that he could bear
To last so long; but ten slow years have fled
Since the first book that brought the trouble and pain
Was printed,—and within the parlour there
Teddy is sitting, busy as a bee.
Doing? He dreams the world that knows him not

Rings with his praises, and for many an hour
Sits busy with the verse of later years,
Marks, copies, and arranges it with care,
To go to some great printer that he thinks
Is waiting; and from time to time he eyes
The books they printed, numbering the lines,
Counting the pages. Sometimes he is Burns,
Sometimes John Milton, sometimes other men,
And sometimes—always looking saddest then—
Knows he is Teddy Crowhurst. Thin he is,
And worn, and feeble,—wearing slowly down
Like snowdrift; and at times, when Memory
Comes for a moment like a mirror flash'd
Into his eyes, he does not groan and weep,
But droops the more, and seems resign'd and still.
True Heart, I fear the end is near at last!
He sits and hearkens vacantly and dreams,
He thrills at every knocking at the door,
Stilly he waits for light that never comes,
That never will return until the end.
And oft at evening, when my work is done,
And the dark gathers, and he holds my hand,
The waiting grows intenser, and becomes
The sense o' life itself. Take Teddy hence!

Show me the man will draw my hand away!
I am a quiet comfort to his pain;
For though his thoughts be far away from here,
I know he feels my hand; and ah! the touch
Just keeps his heart from breaking. 'Tis my joy
To work where I can watch him through the day,
And quiet him, and see he wants for nought.
He loves to sit among his books and flowers,
And wears away with little pain, and feels
The quiet parlour is a pleasant place;
And there—God bless him!—in a happy time
Teddy will feel the darkness pass away,
And smile farewell upon his wife and girl,
And Light that he has lost will come again
To shine upon him as he goes to sleep.

VII.

ARTIST AND MODEL:

A Love Poem.

The scorn of the nations is bitter
 But the touch of a hand is warm.

ARTIST AND MODEL.

IS it not pleasant to wander
  In town on Saturday night,
While people go hither and thither,
  And shops shed cheerful light?
And, arm in arm, while our shadows
  Chase us along the panes,
Are we not quite as cozy
  As down among country lanes?

Nobody knows us, heeds us,
  Nobody hears or sees,
And the shop-lights gleam more gladly
  Than the moon on hedges and trees;

And people coming and going,
  All upon ends of their own,
Though they work a spell on the spirit,
  Make it more finely alone.

The sound seems harmless and pleasant
  As the murmur of brook and wind;
The shops with the fruit and the pictures
  Have sweetness to suit my mind;
And nobody knows us, heeds us,
  And our loving none reproves,—
I, the poor figure-painter!
  You, the lady he loves!

And what if the world should scorn you,
  For now and again, as you do,
Assuming a country kirtle,
  And bonnet of straw thereto,
Or the robe of a vestal virgin,
  Or a nun's gray gabardine,
And keeping a brother and sister
  By standing and looking divine?

And what if the world, moreover,
  Should silently pass me by,
Because, at the dawn of the struggie,
  I labour some stories high!
Why, there's comfort in waiting, working,
  And feeling one's heart beat right,—
And rambling alone, love-making,
  In London on Saturday night.

For when, with a blush Titianic,
  You peep'd in that lodging of mine,
Did I not praise the good angels
  For sending a model so fine?
When I was fill'd with the pureness
  You brought to the lonely abode,
Did I not learn to love you?
  And—did Love not lighten the load?

And haply, indeed, little darling,
  While I yearn'd and plotted and plann'd,
And you watch'd me in love and in yearning,
  Your heart did not quite understand

All the wonder and aspiration
  You meant by your loveliness,
All the faith in the frantic endeavour
  Your beautiful face could express!

For your love and your beauty have thriven
  On things of a low degree,
And you do not comprehend clearly
  The drift of a dreamer like me;
And perchance, when you look'd so divinely,
  You meant, and meant only, to say:
"How sad that he dwells in a garret!
  And lives on so little a day!"

What of that? If your sweetness and beauty,
  And the love that is part of thee,
Were mirror'd in wilder visions,
  And express'd much more to me,
Did the beautiful face, my darling,
  Need subtler, loftier lore?—
Nay, beauty is all our wisdom,—
  We painters demand no more.

Indeed, I had been no painter,
And never could hope to rise,
Had I lack'd the power of creating
The meanings for your sweet eyes;
And what you were really thinking
Scarcely imported, in sooth,—
Since the truth we artists fail for,
Is the truth that looks the truth.

Your beautiful face was before me,
Set in its golden hair;
And the wonder and love and yearning
Were shining sublimely there!
And your eyes said—"Work for glory!
Up, up, where the angels call!"
And I understood, and I labour'd,
And I love the face for it all!

I am talking, you think, so strangely!
And you watch with wondering eyes!—
Could I utter one half of the yearning
Your face, even now, implies!

But the yearning will not be utter'd,
And never, ah! never can be,
Till the work of the world is over,
And we see as immortals see.

Yet bless thee for ever and ever,
For keeping me humble and true,
And would that mine Art could utter
The wisdom I find in you.
Enough to labour and labour,
And to feel one's heart beat right,
And to wander unknown, love-making,
In London on Saturday night!

You think: "How dearly I love him!
How dearly he loves me!
How sweet to live on, and love him,
With children at my knee!
With the useless labour over,
And comfort and leisure won,
And clever people praising
The work that he has done!"

I think: "How dearly I love her!
  How dearly she loves me!
Yet the beauty the heart would utter
  Endeth in agony;
And life is a climbing, a seeking
  Of something we never can see!
And death is a slumber, a dreaming
  Of something that may not be!"

And your face is sweetly troubled,
  Your little hand stirs on mine own,
For you guess at a hidden meaning,
  Since I speak in so tender a tone;
And you rain the yearning upon me
  You brought to my help before,
And I ask no mightier wisdom,—
  We painters demand no more.

And we shall live, my darling,
  Together till we grow old,
And people will buy my pictures,
  And you will gather the gold,

And your loveliness will reward me,
  And sanctify all I do,
And toiling for Love's sake, darling,
  I may toil for Fame's sake, too.

Ah, dearest, how much you teach me,
  How much of hope and of light,
Up yonder, planning and painting,
  And here on Saturday night;
And I turn sad eyes no longer
  From the pageant that passes around,
And the vision no more seems weary,
  And the head may yet be crown'd!

And I ask no more from mortals
  Than your beautiful face implies,—
The beauty the artist beholding
  Interprets and sanctifies.
Who says that men have fallen,
  That life is wretched and rough?
I say, the world is lovely,
  And that loveliness is enough.

So my doubting days are ended,
And the labour of life seems clear;
And life hums deeply around me,
Just like the murmur here,
And quickens the sense of living,
And shapes me for peace and storm,—
And dims my eyes with gladness
When it glides into colour and form !

His form and His colour, darling,
Are all we apprehend,
Though the meaning that underlies them
May be utter'd in the end ;
And I seek to go no deeper
Than the beauty and wonder there,
Since the world can look so wondrous,
And your face can look so fair.

For ah ! life's stream is bitter,
When too greedily we drink,
And I might not be so happy
If I knew quite all you think ;

And when God takes much, my darling,
  He leaves us the colour and form.—
The scorn of the nations is bitter,
  But the touch of a hand is warm

VIII.

NELL.

She gazes not at her who hears,
  But, while the gathering darkness cries,
Stares at the vacancy through tears,
  That burn upon her glistening eyes,
Yet do not fall. Her hair falls free
  Around a face grown deathly thin;
Her elbow rests upon her knee,
  And in her palms she props her chin;
Her voice sounds hollow on the air
  And often, ere her tale is told,
A groan disturbs her blank despair,
  And leaves a sense of bitter cold.

NELL.

I.

YOU'RE a kind woman, Nan! ay, kind and true!
God will be good to faithful folk like you!
The neighbours all look black, and snap me short—
Well, I shall soon be gone from Camden Court.
You knew my Ned?
A better, kinder lad never drew breath—
We loved each other true, though never wed
In church, like some who took him to his death:
A lad as gentle as a lamb, but lost
His senses when he took a drop too much—
Drink did it all—drink made him mad when cross'd—
He was a poor man, and they 're hard on such.
So kind! so true! that life should come to this!

Gentle and good!—the very week before
The fit came on him, and he went amiss,
He brought me home, and gave me, with a kiss,
That muslin gown as hangs behind the door.

II.

O Nan! that night! that night!
When I was sitting in this very chair,
Watching and waiting in the candle-light,
And heard his foot come creaking up the stair,
And turn'd, and saw him standing yonder, white
And wild, with staring eyes and rumpled hair!
And when I caught his arm and call'd, in fright,
He push'd me, swore, and pass'd
Back to the door, and lock'd and barr'd it fast!
Then dropp'd down heavy as a lump of lead,
Holding his brow, shaking, and growing whiter,
And—Nan!—just then the candle-light grew brighter,
And I could see the hands that held his head,
All red! all red!
What could I do but scream? He groan'd to hear,
Jump'd to his feet, and gripp'd me by the wrist;
"Be still, or I shall kill thee, Nell!" he hiss'd.

And I was still for fear.
"They 're after me—I 've knifed a man!" he said.
"Be still!—the drink—drink did it—he is *dead!*"
And as he said the word, the wind went by
With a whistle and cry—
The room swam round—the babe unborn seem'd to
scream out, and die!

III.

Then we grew still, so still. I couldn't weep—
All I could do was cling to him and hark—
And Ned was cold, cold, cold, as if asleep,
But breathing hard and deep;
The candle flicker'd out—the room grew dark—
And—Nan!—although my heart was true and tried,—
When all grew cold and dim,
I shudder'd—not for fear of them outside,
But just afraid to be alone with *him*:
And he was hard, he was—the wind it cried—
A foot went hollow down the court and died—
What could I do but clasp his knees and cling?
And call his name beneath my breath in pain?
Until he raised his head a-listening,
And gave a groan, and hid his face again;

"Ned! Ned!" I whisper'd—and he moan'd and
shook—
But did not heed or look!
"Ned! Ned! speak, lad! tell me it is not true!"
At that he raised his head and look'd so wild,
Then, with a stare that froze my blood, he threw
His arms around me, sobbing like a child,
And held me close—and not a word was spoken—
While I clung tighter to his heart and press'd
him—
And did not fear him, though my heart was broken—
But kiss'd his poor stain'd hands, and cried, and
bless'd him!

IV.

Then, Nan, the dreadful daylight, coming cold
With sound o' falling rain,—
When I could see his face, and it look'd old,
Like the pinch'd face of one as dies in pain;
Well, though we heard folk stirring in the sun,
We never thought to hide away or run,
Until we heard those voices in the street,
That hurrying of feet.
And Ned leap'd up, and knew that they had come.
"Run, Ned!" I cried, but he was deaf and dumb!

"Hide, Ned!" I scream'd, and held him—"hide
thee, man!"
He stared with bloodshot eyes, and hearken'd, Nan!
And all the rest is like a dream—the sound
Of knocking at the door—
A rush of men—a struggle on the ground—
A mist—a tramp—a roar;
For when I got my senses back again,
The room was empty,—and my head went round!
The neighbours talk'd and stirr'd about the lane,
And Seven Dials made a moaning sound;
And as I listen'd, lass, it seem'd to me
Just like the murmur of a great dark sea,
And Ned a-lying somewhere, stiff and drown'd!

V.

God help him? God *will* help him! Ay, no fear!
It was the drink, not Ned—he meant no wrong;
So kind! so good!—and I am useless here,
Now he is lost as loved me true and long
Why, just before the last of it, we parted,
And Ned was calm, though I was broken-hearted;
And ah, my heart was broke! and ah, I cried
And kiss'd him,—till they took me from his side;

And though he died *that way*, (God bless him !) Ned
  Went through it bravely, calm as any there :
They 've wrought their fill of spite upon his head,
  And—there 's the hat and clothes he used to wear!

VI.

. . . That night before he died,
I didn't cry—my heart was hard and dried;
But when the clocks went "one," I took my shawl
  To cover up my face, and stole away,
And walk'd along the moonlight streets, where all
  Look'd cold and still and gray,—
Only the lamps o' London here and there
  Scatter'd a dismal gleaming;
And on I went, and stood in Leicester Square,
  Just like a woman dreaming:
But just as "three" was sounded close at hand,
  I started and turn'd east, before I knew,—
Then down Saint Martin's Lane, along the Strand,
  And through the toll-gate, on to Waterloo.
How I remember all I saw, although
  'Twas only like a dream!—
The long still lines o' lights, the chilly gleam
  Of moonshine on the deep black stream below;

While far, far, far away, along the sky
  Streaks soft as silver ran,
And the pale moon look'd paler up on high,
  And little sounds in far-off streets began!
Well, while I stood, and waited, and look'd down,
And thought how sweet 'twould be to drop and drown,
Some men and lads went by,
  And I turn'd round, and gazed, and watch'd 'em go,
Then felt that they were going to see him die,
  And drew my shawl more tight, and follow'd slow.
How clear I feel it still!
  The streets grew light, but rain began to fall;
I stopp'd and had some coffee at a stall,
  Because I felt so chill;
A cock crew somewhere, and it seem'd a call
  To wake the folk who kill!
The man who sold the coffee stared at me!
I must have been a sorry sight to see!
  More people pass'd—a country cart with hay
Stopp'd close beside the stall,—and two or three
  Talk'd about it! I moan'd, and crept away!

VII.

Ay, nearer, nearer to the dreadful place,
  All in the falling rain,
I went, and kept my shawl upon my face,
  And felt no grief or pain—
Only the wet that soak'd me through and through
  Seem'd cold and sweet and pleasant to the touch—
It made the streets more drear and silent, too,
  And kept away the light I fear'd so much.
Slow, slow the wet streets fill'd, and all were going,
  Laughing and chatting, the same way,
And grayer, sadder, lighter, it was growing,
  Though still the rain fell fast and darken'd day!
Nan!—every pulse was burning—I could feel
My heart was made o' steel—
As, crossing Ludgate Hill, where many stirr'd,
  I saw Saint Paul's great clock and heard it chime,
And hadn't power to count the strokes I heard,
  But strain'd my eyes and saw it was not time;
Ah! then I felt I dared not creep more near,
  But went into a lane off Ludgate Hill,
And sitting on a doorstep, I could hear
  The people gathering still!

And still the rain was falling, falling,
And deadening the hum I heard from *there;*
And wet and stiff, I heard the people calling,
And watch'd the rain-drops glistening down my hair,
My elbows on my knees, my fingers dead,—
My shawl thrown off, now none could see,—my head
Dripping and wild and bare.
I heard the murmur of a crowd of men,
And next, a hammering sound I knew full well,
For something gripp'd me round the heart!—and then
There came the solemn tolling of a bell!
O Lord! O Lord! how could I sit close by
And neither scream nor cry?
As if I had been stone, all hard and cold,
But listening, listening, listening, still and dumb,
While the folk murmur'd, and the death-bell toll'd,
And the day brighten'd, and his time had come. . .
. . . Till—Nan!—all else was silent, but the knell
Of the slow bell!
And I could only wait, and wait, and wait,
And what I waited for I couldn't tell.—
At last there came a groaning deep and great—
Saint Paul's struck "eight"—
I scream'd, and seem'd to turn to fire, and fell!

VIII.

God bless him, live or dead!
  He never meant no wrong, was kind and true—
They 've wrought their fill of spite upon his head—
  Why didn't they be kind, and take me too?
And there 's the dear old things he used to wear,
And here 's a lock o' hair!
And they 're more precious far than gold galore,
  Than all the wealth and gold in London town!
He 'll never wear the hat and clothes no more,
  And I shall never wear the muslin gown!
And Ned! my Ned!
  Is fast asleep, and cannot hear me call;—
God bless you, Nan, for all you 've done and said,
  But don't mind *me!* My heart is broke—that 's all!

IX.

ATTORNEY SNEAK.

Sharp like a tyrant, timid like a slave,
  A little man, with yellow, bloodless cheek;
A snappish mingling of the fool and knave,
  Resulting in the hybrid compound—Sneak.

ATTORNEY SNEAK.

PUT execution in on Mrs Hart—
If people will be careless, let them smart:
Oh, hang her children! just the common cry!
Am I to feed her family? Not I.
I 'm tender-hearted, but I dare be just,—
I never go beyond the law, I trust;
I 've work'd my way, plotted and starved and plann'd,
Commenced without a penny in my hand,
And never howl'd for help, or dealt in sham—
No! I 'm a man of principle, I am.

What 's that you say? Oh, *father* has been here?
Of course, you sent him packing? Dear, oh, dear!

When one has work'd his weary way, like me,
To comfort and respectability,
Can pay his bills, and save a pound or two,
And say his prayers on Sunday in a pew,
Can look the laws of England in the face,
'Tis hard, 'tis hard, 'tis shame, and 'tis disgrace,
That one's own father—old and worn and gray—
Should be the only hindrance in his way.
Swore, did he? Very pretty! Threaten'd? Oh!
Demanded money? You, of course, said "No?"
'Tis hard—my life will never be secure—
He 'll be my ruin some day, I am sure.

I don't deny my origin was low—
All the more credit to myself, you know:
Mother (I never saw her) was a tramp,
Father half tramp, half pedlar, and whole scamp,
Who travell'd over England with a pack,
And carried me about upon his back,
Trudging from door to door, to feasts and fairs,
Cheating the silly women with his wares,
Stealing the farmers' ducks and hens for food,
Pilfering odds and ends where'er he could,

And resting in a city now and then,
Till it became too hot,—and off again.
Beat me? No, he knew better. I confess
He used me with a sort of tenderness;
But would have warp'd my nature into sin,
Had I been weak, for lack of discipline.
Why, even now, I shudder to the soul,
To think how oft I ate the food he stole,
And how I wore upon my back the things
He won by cheats and lawless bargainings.
Oh, he had feelings, that I freely say;
But, without principle, what good are they?
He swindled and he stole on every hand,
And I was far too young to reprimand;
And, for the rest, why, he was circumspect,
And might have been committed for neglect.

Ah! how I managed, under stars so ill,
To thrive at all, to me is mystery still.
In spite of father, though, I got along,
And early learn'd to judge the right from wrong;
At roadsides, when we stopp'd to rest and feed,
He gave me lessons how to write and read,

I got a snack of schooling here and there,
And learn'd to sum by instinct, as it were.
Then, latterly, when I was seventeen,
All sorts of evil I had heard and seen;
Knew father's evil ways, bemoan'd my fate,
Long'd to be wealthy, virtuous, and great;
Swore, with the fond ambition of a lad,
To make good use of what poor gifts I had.

At last, tired, sick, of wandering up and down,
Hither I turn'd my thoughts,—to London town;
And finally, with little doubt or fear,
Made up my mind to try my fortune here.
Well, father stared at first, and shook his head;
But when he found I held to what I said,
He clasp'd me tight, and hugg'd me to his heart,
And begg'd and pray'd that I would not depart;
Said I was all for whom he had to care,
His only joy in trudging here and there;
Vow'd, if I ever left him, he would die,—
Then, last of all, of course, began to cry.
You know how men of his position feel?
Selfish, at best, even when it is real!

I tried to smooth him over, and, next day,
I pack'd what things I had, and ran away.

I need not tell you all my weary fight,
To get along in life, and do aright—
How often people, when I sought a place,
Still push'd my blessed father in my face;
Until, at last, when I was almost stark,
Old Lawyer Hawk made me his under-clerk;
How from that moment, by avoiding wrong,
Possessing principle, I got along;
Read for the law, plotted, and dream'd, and plann'd,
Until—I reach'd the height on which I stand.

'Twas hard, 'twas hard! Just as my business grows,
In father pops his miserable nose,
Steps in, not sober, in a ragged dress,
And worn tenfold with want and wickedness;
Calls me hard names because I wish'd to rise;
Here, in the office, like a baby cries;
Smothers my pride with shame and with disgrace,
Till, red as fire, I coax'd him from the place.

What could I do under so great a blow?
I gave him money, tried to make him go;
But ah! he meant to rest, I plain could see,
His ragged legs 'neath my mahogany!
No principle! When I began complaining,
How he would be my ruin by remaining,
He turn'd upon me, white and wild, and swore,
And would have hit me, had I utter'd more.

"Tommy," he dared to say, "you 've done amiss;
I never thought to see you come to this.
I would have stopp'd you early on the journey,
If I had ever thought you 'd grow attorney,
Sucking the blood of people here in London;
But you have done it, and it can't be undone.
And, Tommy, I will do my best to see
You don't at all disgrace yourself and me."

I rack'd my brains, I moan'd and tore my hair,
Saw nothing left but ruin and despair;
Father at hand, why, all would deem me low:
"Sneak's father? humph!"—the business would go.

The labour of long years would come to nought!
At last I hit upon a happy thought:
Why should not father, if he pleased to be,
Be decent and respectable like me;
He would be glad and grateful, if a grain
Of principle were settled in his brain.
I made the offer,—proud he seem'd and glad,—
There rose a hope he 'd change to good from bad,
Though, "Tommy, 'tis a way of getting bread
I never thought to come upon," he said;
And so I put him in the office here,
A clerk at five and thirty pounds a year.

I put it to you, could a man do more?
I felt no malice, did not close my door,
But gave the chance to show if he was wise:
He had the world before him, and could rise.

Well, for a month or more, he play'd no tricks,
Writ-drawing, copying, from nine to six,
Not smart, of course, nor clever, like the rest,
But trying, it appear'd, to do his best;

But by and by he changed—old fire broke out—
He snapp'd when seniors order'd him about—
Came late to office, tried to loaf and shirk—
Would sit for precious hours before his work,
And scarcely lift a pen, but sleepily stare
Out through the window at the empty air,
And watch the sunshine lying in the lane,
Or the bluebottles buzzing on the pane,
And look as sad and worn and grieved and strange
As if he ne'er had had a chance to change;
Came one day staggering in a drunken fit;
Flatly refused one day to serve a writ.
I talk'd, appeal'd, talk'd of my honest name,
He stared, turn'd pale, swore loud, and out it came:
He hated living with that monkey crew,
Had tried his best and found it would not do;
He could not bear, forsooth, to watch the tears
Of people with the Law about their ears,
Would rather steal his meals from place to place,
Than bring the sorrow to a poor man's face—
In fact, you see, he hated all who pay,
Or seek their moneys in the honest way;
Moreover, he preferr'd a roadside crust,
To cleanly living with the good and just:

Old, wild, and used to roaming up and down,
He could not bear to stagnate in a town;
To stick in a dark office in a street,
Was downright misery to a man with feet;
Serving the law was more than he could bear,
Give him his pack, his freedom, and fresh air.

Mark that! how base, ungrateful, gross, and bad!
His want of principle had made him mad.
I gave him money, sent him off by train,
And trusted ne'er to see his face again.

But he came back. Of course. Look'd wan and ill,
More ragged and disreputable still.
Despairing, groaning, wretchedest of men,
I granted him another trial then.
Still the old story—the same vacant stare
Out through the window at the empty air,
More watching of the sunshine in the lane,
And the bluebottles buzzing on the pane,
Then more of tipsiness and drunken dizziness,
And rage at things done in the way of business.

I saw the very office servants sneer,
And I determined to be more severe.
At last, one winter morn, I went to him,
And found him sitting, melancholy, grim,
Sprawling like any schoolboy on his seat,
And scratching drawings on a foolscap sheet:
Here, an old hag, with half-a-dozen chits,
Lash'd with a cat-o'-nine tails, labell'd "WRITS;"
There, a young rascal, ragged as a daw,
Drinking a cup of poison, labell'd "LAW;"
Elsewhere, the Devil, looking o'er a pile
Of old indictments with a crafty smile,
And sticking Lawyers on an office file;
And in a corner, wretchedly devised,
A shape in black, that kick'd and agonised,
Strung by a pauper to a gallows great,
And underneath it written, "TOMMIE'S FATE!"
I touch'd his arm, conducted him aside,
Produced a bunch of documents, and cried:
"Now, father, no more nonsense! You must be
No more a plague and a disgrace to me—
If you won't work like others, you must quit;
See, here are two subpœnas, there a writ,

Serve these on Such-a-one and So-and-So.
Be sharp,—and mind your conduct, or you go."
He never said a word, but with a glare
All round him, drew his thin hand through his hair,
Turn'd white, and took the papers silently,
Put on his hat, and peep'd again at me.
Then quietly, not like a man in ire,
Placed all the precious papers on the fire!
And turning quickly, crying with a shout,
"You, and all documents, be *damn'd!*" went out.

He came again! Ay, after wandering o'er
The country as of old, he came once more.
I gave him money, off he went; and then,
After a little year, he came again;
Ay, came, and came, still ragged, bad, and poor,
And he will be my ruin, I am sure.
He tells the same old tale from year to year,
How to his heart I ever will be dear;
Or oft into a fit of passion flies,
Calls me ungrateful and unkind,—then cries,
Raves of his tenderness and suffering,
And mother's too——and all that sort of thing!

He haunts me like a goblin pale and grim,
And—to be candid—I'm afraid of him;
For, ah! all now is hopeless, to my cost,—
Through want of principle the man is lost.

—That's Badger, is it? He must go to Vere,
The Bank of England clerk. The writ is here.
Say, for his children's sake, we will relent,
If he'll renew at thirty-five per cent.

X.

BARBARA GRAY.

A mourning woman, robed in black,
Stands in the twilight, looking back;
Her hand is on her heart, her head
Bends musingly above the Dead,
Her face is plain, and pinch'd, and thin,
But splendour strikes it from within

BARBARA GRAY.

I.

"BARBARA GRAY!
Pause, and remember what the world will say,"
I cried, and turning on the threshold fled,
When he was breathing on his dying bed;
But when, with heart grown bold,
I cross'd the threshold cold,
Here lay John Hamerton, and he was dead.

II.

And all the house of death was chill and dim,
The dull old housekeeper was looking grim,
The hall-clock ticking slow, the dismal rain
Splashing by fits against the window-pane,
The garden shivering in the twilight dark,
Beyond, the bare trees of the empty park,

And faint gray light upon the great cold bed,
And I alone; and he I turn'd from,—dead.

III.

Ay, "dwarf" they called this man who sleeping lies;
No lady shone upon him with her eyes,
No tender maiden heard his true-love vow,
And pressed her kisses on the great bold brow.
What cared John Hamerton? With light, light laugh,
He halted through the streets upon his staff;
Halt, lame, not beauteous, yet with winning grace
And sweetness in his pale and quiet face;
Fire, hell's or heaven's, in his eyes of blue;
Warm words of love upon his tongue thereto;
Could win a woman's Soul with what he said,
And I am here; and here he lieth dead.

IV.

I would not blush if the bad world saw now
How by his bed I stoop and kiss his brow!
Ay, kiss it, kiss it, o'er and o'er again,
With all the love that fills my heart and brain.

V.

For where was man had stoop'd to me before,
Though I was maiden still, and girl no more?
Where was the spirit that had deign'd to prize

The poor plain features and the envious eyes?
What lips had whisper'd warmly in mine ears?
When had I known the passion and the tears?
Till he I look on sleeping came unto me,
Found me among the shadows, stoop'd to woo me,
Seized on the heart that flutter'd withering here,
Strung it, and wrung it, with new joy and fear,
Yea, brought the rapturous light, and brought the day,
Waken'd the dead heart, withering away,
Put thorns and roses on the unhonour'd head,
That felt but roses till the roses fled!
Who, who, but he crept unto sunless ground,
Content to prize the faded face he found?
John Hamerton, I pardon all—sleep sound, my love,
 sleep sound!

VI.

What fool that crawls shall prate of shame and sin?
Did he not think me fair enough to win?
Yea, stoop and smile upon my face as none,
Living or dead, save he alone, had done?
Bring the bright blush unto my cheek, when ne'er
The full of life and love had mantled there?
And I am all alone; and here lies he,—
The only man that ever smiled on me.

VII.

Here, in his lonely dwelling-house he lies,
The light all faded from his winsome eyes:
Alone, alone, alone, he slumbers here,
With wife nor little child to shed a tear!
Little, indeed, to him did nature give;
Nor was he good and pure as some that live,
But pinch'd in body, warp'd in limb,
He hated the bad world that loved not him!

VIII.

Barbara Gray!
Pause, and remember how he turn'd away;
Think of your wrongs, and of your sorrows. Nay!
Woman, think rather of the shame and wrong
Of pining lonely in the dark so long;
Think of the comfort in the grief he brought,
The revelation in the love he taught.
Then, Barbara Gray!
Blush not, nor heed what the cold world will say,
But kiss him, kiss him, o'er and o'er again,
In passion and in pain,
With all the love that fills your heart and brain!
Yea, kiss him, bless him, pray beside his bed,
For you have lived, and here your love lies dead.

XI.

THE BLIND LINNET.

τί γὰρ ἔδει μ' ὁρᾶν,
ὅτῳ γ' ὁρῶντι μηδὲν ἦν ἰδεῖν γλυκύ;

SOPH. ŒD. TYR.

THE BLIND LINNET.

I.

THE sempstress's linnet sings
At the window opposite me;—
It feels the sun on its wings,
Though it cannot see.
Can a bird have thoughts? May be.

II.

The sempstress is sitting,
High o'er the humming street,
The little blind linnet is flitting
Between the sun and her seat.

All day long
  She stitches wearily there,
And I know she is not young,
  And I know she is not fair;
For I watch her head bent down
  Throughout the dreary day,
And the thin meek hair o' brown
  Is threaded with silver gray;
And now and then, with a start
At the fluttering of her heart,
  She lifts her eyes to the bird,
And I see in the dreary place
The gleam of a thin white face.
  And my heart is stirr'd.

III.

Loud and long
The linnet pipes his song!
For he cannot see
  The smoky street all round,
But loud in the sun sings he,
  Though he hears the murmurous sound;
For his poor, blind eyeballs blink,
  While the yellow sunlights fall,

And he thinks (if a bird can think)
He hears a waterfall,
Or the broad and beautiful river
Washing fields of corn,
Flowing for ever
Through the woods where he was born;
And his voice grows stronger,
While he thinks that he is there,
And louder and longer
Falls his song on the dusky air.
And oft, in the gloaming still,
Perhaps (for who can tell?)
The musk and the muskatel,
That grow on the window sill,
Cheat him with their smell.

IV.

But the sempstress can see
How dark things be;
How black through the town
The stream is flowing;
And tears fall down
Upon her sewing.

So at times she tries,
  When her trouble is stirr'd,
To close her eyes,
  And be blind like the bird.
And *then*, for a minute,
  As sweet things seem,
As to the linnet
  Piping in his dream!
For she feels on her brow
  The sunlight glowing,
And hears nought now
  But a river flowing—
A broad and beautiful river,
  Washing fields of corn,
Flowing for ever
  Through the woods where she was born—
And a wild bird winging
Over her head, and singing!
And she can smell
The musk and the muskatel
  That beside her grow,
And, unaware,
She murmurs an old air
  That she used to know!

XII.

LONDON, 1864

LONDON, 1864.

I.

WHY should the heart seem colder,
As the song grows stronger and surer?
Why should the brain grow darker,
And the utterance clearer and purer?
To lose what the people are gaining
Seems often bitter as gall,
Though to sink in the proud endeavour
Were the bitterest of all.
I would to God I were lying
Yonder 'mong mountains blue,
Smiling in sweet conceptions
That were dried from my brow like dew.

Burning, and aching, and yearning
  To conquer, to sing, and to teach,
With the brain at white-heat, clutching
  At visions beyond my reach,—
But with never a feeling or fancy
  I could utter in tuneful speech!

II.

Yea! that were richer and sweeter
  Than all that my soul hath found,—
Than to see and to know, and be able
  To utter the knowledge in sound;
For the heart feels colder and harder,
  And a glory hath gone from me,
And I hate, for I view so clearly,
  So much that I loved to see,
And the far blue misty mountains
  Are grand as they used to be!

III.

And Art, the avenging angel,
  Comes, with her still, gray eyes,
Kisses my forehead coldly,
  Whispers to make me wise;

And, too late, comes the revelation,
  After the feast and the play,
That she works her end, not by giving,
  But cruelly taking away:
By burning the heart till it shrivels,
  Scorching it dry and deep
And changing the flower of living
  To a poor dried flower that may keep!
What wonder if often and often
  The passion, the wonder dies;
And I hate the terrible angel,
  And shrink from her passionless eyes,—
Who, instead of the rapture and vision,
  I held as the poet's dower—
Instead of the glory of living,
  The impulse, the splendour, the power—
Instead of the singing raiment,
  The trumpet proclaiming the day,
Gives, and so coldly, only
  A pipe whereon to play!
While the spirit of boyhood hath perish'd,
  And never again can be,
And the singing seems so worthless,
  Since the glory hath gone from me,—

Though the far blue misty mountains,
  And the earth and the air and the sea,
And the manifold music and beauty,
  Are grand as they used to be!

IV.

Is there a consolation
  For the joy that comes never again?
Is there a balm remaining?
  Is there a refuge from pain?
Is there a balm to quiet
  The shame and the grief and the stinging?
Only the sweet, strange sadness,
  That is the source of the singing.

V.

For the sound of the city is awful,
  As the people pass to and fro,
And the friendless faces are dreadful,
  As they come, and thrill through us, and go;
And the ties that bind us to others
  Of our error and weakness are born;
And our dear ones ever love dearest
  Those parts of ourselves that we scorn;

And the weariness will not be utter'd,
  And the bitterness dare not be said,
And we hood the proud nature with meanness
  To shut out the sight of our Dead!
And what, then, remaineth as solace?
  Dear ones, or fortune, or fame?
Only the sweet singing sadness
  Cometh between us and shame.

VI.

And there dawneth a time to the Poet,
  When the bitterness passes away,
When his heart is humbled in silence,
  And he kneels in the dark to pray;
And the prayer is turn'd into music,
  And the music findeth a tongue,
And Art, the cold angel, seems kinder,
  And comforts the soul she has stung.
Then the Poet, worn with the struggle,
  Findeth his loss is his gain:
The sweet singing sadness is stranger,
  Though nought of the glory remain;
And the awful sound of the city,
  And the terrible faces around,

Take a truer, tenderer meaning,
And pass into sweetness and sound;
The mystery deepens and deepens,
Strange vanishings gleam from the cloud,
And the Poet, though often and often
Stricken, and eyeless, and bow'd,
Starteth at times from his wonder,
And sendeth his Soul up aloud!

VII.

Lo! I stand at the gateway of Honour,
And see the lights flashing within,
And I murmur these songs of the city,
Its sorrow, its joy, and its sin;
And the sweetness is heavy upon me,
Though grown of the past and its wrong;
My losses are sure if that sweetness
Be felt in the soul of the song.
I murmur these songs of the city,
And cast them as bread on the sea;
And mine eyes are dim with the singing
That is all in the world to me!

MISCELLANEOUS.

THE DEATH OF ROLAND.

De Karlemanc et de Rolant,
Et d'Olivier, et des vassaus,
Qui moururent à Rainscevaux!

I.

DEAD was Gerard the fair, the woman-mouth'd, the gay,
Who jested with the foe he slung his sword to slay;
Dead was the giant Guy, big-hearted, small of brain;
Dead was the hunchback Sanche, his red haunch slit in twain;
Dead was the old hawk Luz, and sleeping by his side
His twin-sons, Charles the Fleet, and Pierre the serpent-eyed;

Dead was Antoine, the same who swore to speak no
word
Till twice a hundred heads fell by his single sword;
Dead was the wise Gerin, who gripp'd both spear and
pen;
Sansun was dead, Gereir was dead!—dead were the
mighty men!

II.

Then Roland felt his life return, and stirr'd, and
cried,
Felt down if Adalmar lay safe against his side,
And smilèd quietlie, for joy the sword was there,
With heavy mailèd hand push'd back his bloody hair,
And lying prone upon his back, beheld on high
The stars like leopard-spots strewn in the deep gray
sky,
And turn'd his head, and saw the great hills looming
dim,
And in the west the Moon with red and wasting rim;
Then sighing deep, swung round his head as in a
swoon,
And met the hunchback's eyne, glazèd beneath the
Moon.

Chill was the air, and frosty vapours to and fro,
Like sheeted shapes, in dim moonshine, crawl'd to and fro;
And Roland thought, because his wound had made him weak,
The cold shapes breathed alive their breath upon his cheek,
And crawling to his knees, shivering in the cold,
Loosen'd his helm, and dimly gleaming down it roll'd;
And slowly his faint eyes distinguish'd things around,—
The dark and moveless shapes asleep upon the ground,
A helmet glittering dim, a sword-hilt twinkling red,
A white horse quivering beside a warrior dead,
And in one moonlit place a ring on a white hand,
When Roland thought, "Gerard! the merriest of the band!"
And no one stirr'd; behind, the hills loom'd cold and dim;
And in the west the waning Moon with red and wasting rim.

III.

Then Roland cried aloud, "If living man there be
Among these heaps of slain, let that man answer me!"

And no man spake. The wind crept chilly over all,
But no man felt it breathe, or heard the leader call.
"Ho, Olivier! Gerin! speak, an' ye be not dead!"
Small voices of the hills afar off echoèd,—
Only a heathen churl rose cursing on his side,
And spat at him who spake, and curl'd his limbs, and
died.
Then Roland's mighty heart was heavy with its woes,—
When suddenly, across the fields, faint radiance rose,
First a faint spark, and then a gleam, and then a glare,
Then smoke and crimson streaks that mingled in the
air,
And as the thick flame clear'd, and the black smoke
swam higher,
There loom'd beyond a shape like one girt round with
fire.
And Roland cried aloud, because his joy was great,
And brandish'd Adalmar, and fell beneath the weight,
And lying prone strain'd eyes, and, gazing through the
night,
Still saw the glittering shape girt round with smoky
light,
And seemèd in a dream, and could not think at all,
Until his heart rose up, and he had strength to crawl,

Then like a bruisèd worm weary he crept and slow,
Straining his fever'd eyes lest the sweet light should go,
And often paused to breathe, feeling his pulses fail,
'Mong heathens foul to smell and warriors clad in mail,
But coming near the light beheld the godly man,
Turpin the archbishòp, unhelm'd and gaunt and wan,—
Gripping with skinny hand the ivory Cross sat he,
Clad head to heel in bright white mail and propp'd
against a tree.

IV.

And when on hands and knees the stricken chief
came near,
The Bishop raised the Cross, and knew his comrade
dear;
And Roland did not speak, though tears were in his ee,
But touch'd the blessèd Cross, and smilèd painfullie;
While, "Glory be to God!" the Bishop faintly said,
"Thou livest, kinsman dear, though all the rest be
dead!
For while I linger'd here and listen'd for a sound,
And in the dim red moon beheld the dead around,
Thinking I heard a cry, I sought to cry again,
But all my force had fled, and I was spent with pain;

When, peering round, I saw this heathen at my heel,
And search'd his leathern scrip and found me flint and
steel,
Then crawl'd, though swooning-sick, and found his
charger gray,
And searching in the bags found wither'd grass and
hay,
And made a fire, a sign for thee, whoe'er thou wert,
And fainted when it blazed, for I am sorely hurt;
And waken'd to behold thee near, wounded and weak,
The red fire flaming on thy face, thy breath upon my
cheek."

V.

Then those brave chiefs wrung hands, and as the
smoky flare
Died out, and all was dark, the Bishop said a prayer,
And shadows loom'd out black against the frosty
shine,
While Turpin search'd his pouch and murmur'd,
"Here is wine!"
And Roland on his elbows raised himself and quaff'd,
Drank, till his head swam round, a deep and goodly
draught,

And quickly he felt strong, his heart was wild and light,
And placed his dear sword softly down, and rose his height,
Loosening his mail, drew forth the shirt that lay beneath,
And took the blood-stain'd silk and tore it with his teeth,
And dress'd the Bishop's wounds with chilly hand and slow,
Then, while the Bishop pray'd, bound up his own wide wound alsoe.

VI.

Then Roland search'd around, dipping his hands in blood,
Till in a henchman's pack he found a torch of wood,
And taking flint and steel, blew with his mouth, and lo!
The torch blazed bright, and all grew crimson in the glow;
And gave the torch unto the man of holy fame,
Who glittering like fire, sat sickening in the flame,
And crept across the mead, into the dark again,
And felt the faces of the slain, seeking the mighty men.

VII.

Bless'd be thy name, white Mary, for thy breath and light,
Like vapour cold, did fill the nostrils of thy knight!
Yea, all his force came back, his red wound ceased to bleed,
And he had hands of strength to do a blessèd deed!
For one by one he found each well-belovèd head,
Sought out the mighty chiefs, among the heaps of dead,
Softly unloosed their helms, let the long tresses flow,
Trail'd them to Turpin's feet and set them in a row;
And underneath the tree the pine-torch blazèd bright
On dreadful shapes in mail and faces ghastly white:
Sansun, who held his sword with grip that ne'er unloosed;
Gerin, with chin on breast, as if he breathed and mused;
Great Guy, with twisted limbs, and bosom gash'd and bare,
And blood-clots on his arms the cold had frozen there;
Old Luz, his skinny hands fill'd with a foeman's beard;
Charles with his feet lopp'd off, Pierre with his green eye spear'd;

Sanche, the fierce woman's foe, and round his neck, behold!
A lock of lady's hair set in a ring of gold;
Antoine, with crafty smile, as if new fights he plann'd;
Gerard, still smiling on the ring upon his hand;
And, brightest of the band, our Roland's comrade dear,
The iron woman-shape, the long-lock'd Olivier,
Who gript the bladeless hilt of Durandal his pride,
And held it to his kissing lips, as when he swoon'd and died.

VIII.

And Turpin raised the torch, counted them one by one:
"Ah, woe is me, sweet knights, for now your work is done!"
Then, reaching with the Cross, he touch'd their brows and cried:
"White Mary take your souls, and place them at her side!
White Mary take your souls, and guard them tenderlie,—
For ye were goodly men as any men that be!"
And Roland stooping touch'd the brow of Olivier,
Smoothing the silken hair behind the small white ear,

And cried, "Ah, woe is me, that we should ever part!"
And kiss'd him on the foamy lips, and swoon'd for ache of heart.

IX.

And Turpin dropp'd the torch, that flamed upon the ground,
But meeting new-shed blood, went out with hissing sound;
He groped for Roland's heart, and felt it faintly beat,
And, groping on the earth, he found the wine-flask sweet,
And fainting with the toil, slaked not his own great drouth,
But, shivering, held the flask to Roland's foamy mouth:
E'en then, his Soul shot up, and in its shirt of steel
The corse sank back with crash like ice that cracks beneath the heel.

X.

The frosty night-wind waken'd Roland from his swound,
And, spitting salt foam from his tongue, he look'd around,

And saw the Bishop dear lying at length close by,—
Touch'd him, and found him cold, and utter'd up a
cry:
"Now, dead and cold, alas! lieth the noblest wight
For preaching sermons sweet and wielding sword in
fight;
His voice was as a trump that on a mountain blows,
He scatter'd oils of grace and wasted heathen-foes,—
White Mary take his soul, to join our comrades
dear,
And let him wear his bishop's crown in heaven above
as here!"

XI.

Then it grew chiller far, the grass grew moist with dew,
The landskip glimmer'd pale, the hoary breezes blew,
The many stars above melted like snow-flakes white,
And far behind the hills the east was laced with light,
The dismal vale loom'd clear against a crimson glow,
Clouds spread above like wool, pale steam arose
below,
And on the faces dead the frosty morning came,
On mighty men, and foes, and squires unknown to
fame,

And armèd mail gleam'd bright, and broken steel
gleam'd gray,
And cold dew fill'd the wounds of those who sleeping
lay;
And Roland, rising, drank the dawn with lips apart,
But scents were in the air that sicken'd his proud
heart!
Yea, all was deathly still; and now, though it was day,
The moon grew small and pale, but did not pass away,
The white mist wreath'd and curl'd over the glittering
dead,
A cock crew, far among the hills, and echoes answer'd.

XII.

Then peering to the east, across the dewy steam,
He spied a naked wood, and there a running stream;
Thirsting full sore, he rose, and thither did he hie,
Faintly, and panting hard, because his end was nigh;
But first he stooping loosed from Turpin's fingers cold
The Cross inlaid with gems and wrought about with
gold,
And bare the holy Cross aloft in one weak hand,
And with the other trail'd great Adalmar his brand.

Thus wearily he came into the woody place,
And stooping to the stream dippèd therein his face,
And in the pleasant cold let swim his great black curls,
Then swung his forehead up, glittering as with pearls;
And while the black blood spouted in a burning jet,
He loosed the bandage of his wound and made it wet,
Wringing the silken bands, making them free from gore,
Then placed them cool upon the wound, and tighten'd them once more.

XIII.

Eastward rose cloudy mist, drifting like smoke in wind,
Ghastly and round the sun loom'd dismally behind,
High overhead the moon faded with sickle chill,
The frosty wind dropp'd down, and all was deathlier still,
And Roland, drawing deep the breath of vapours cold,
Beheld three marble steps, as of a ruin old,
And at the great tree-bolls lay many a carven stone.
The[illegible]o a dial quaint, where slimy grass had grown;

And frosted were the boughs that gatherèd around,
And cold the runlet crept, with soft and soothing sound,
And Roland smilèd sweet, and thought, "Since death is nigh,
In sooth, I know no gentler place where gentle man could die!"

XIV.

Whereon the warrior heard a sound of breaking boughs,
And, from the thicket wild, leapt one with tannèd brows;
Half-naked, glistening dark with oily limbs, he came,
His long-nail'd fingers curl'd, his little eyes aflame,
Shrieking in his own tongue, as on the chief he flew,
"Yield thee thy sword of fame, and thine own flesh thereto!"
Then Roland gazed and frown'd, though nigh unto his death,
Sat still, and drew up all his strength in a great breath,
Pray'd quickly to the saints he served in former days
With right hand clutch'd the sword he was too weak to raise,

And in the left swung up the Cross, and, shrieking hoarse,
Between the eyebrows smote the foe with all his force,
Yea, smote him to the brain, crashing through skin and bone,
And prone the heathen fell, as heavy as a stone,
And gold and gems of price were loosen'd by the blow,
And, as he fell, rain'd round the wild hair of the foe;
But Roland kiss'd the cross, and, laughing, backward fell,
And on the hollow air the laugh rang heavy, like a knell.

XV.

And Roland thought: "I surely die; but, ere I end,
Let me be sure that thou art ended too, my friend!
For should a heathen hand grasp thee when I am clay,
My ghost would grieve full sore until the judgment day!"
Then to the marble steps, under the tall bare trees,
Trailing the mighty sword, he crawl'd on hands and knees,

And on the slimy stone he struck the blade with
might—
The bright hilt, sounding, shook, the blade flash'd
sparks of light;
Wildly again he struck, and his sick head went round,
Again there sparkled fire, again rang hollow sound;
Ten times he struck, and threw strange echoes down
the glade,
Yet still unbroken, sparkling fire, glitter'd the peerless
blade.

XVI.

Then Roland wept, and set his face against the
stone—
"Ah, woe, I shall not rest, though cold be flesh and
bone!"
And pain was on his soul to die so cheerless death;
When on his naked neck he felt a touch like breath,
And did not stir, but thought, "O God, that madest
me,
And shall my sword of fame brandish'd by heathens
be?
And shall I die accursed, beneath a heathen's heel,
Too weak to slay the slave whose hated breath I
feel?"

Then, clenching teeth, he turn'd to look upon the foe,
His bright eyes growing dim with coming death; and lo!
His life shot up in fire, his heart arose again,
For no unhallow'd face loom'd dark upon his ken,
No heathen-breath he felt,—though he beheld, indeed,
The white arch'd head and round brown eyes of Veillintif, his steed!

XVII.

And pressing his moist cheek on his who gazed beneath,
Curling the upper lip to show the large white teeth,
The white horse, quivering, look'd with melancholy eye,
Then waved his streaming mane, and uttered up a cry;
And Roland's bitterness was spent—he laugh'd, he smiled,
He clasp'd his darling's neck, wept like a little child;
He kiss'd the foamy lips, and hugged his friend, and cried:
"Ah, nevermore, and nevermore, shall we to battle ride!

Ah, nevermore, and nevermore, shall we sweet comrades be!
And Veillintif, had I the heart to die forgetting thee?
To leave thy mighty heart to break, in slavery to the foe?
I had not rested in the grave, if it had ended so.
Ah, never shall we conquering ride, with banners bright unfurl'd,
A shining light 'mong lesser lights, a wonder to the world!"

XVIII.

And Veillintif neigh'd low, breathing on him who died,
Wild rock'd his great strong heart beneath his silken hide,
Tears roll'd from his brown eyes upon his master's cheek,
And Roland, gathering strength, though wholly worn and weak,
Held up the point of Adalmar the peerless brand,
And at his comrade's heart push'd with his dying hand;

And the black blood sprang forth, while heavily as lead,
With quivering, silken side, the mighty steed fell dead;
And Roland, for his eyes with frosty film were dim,
Groped for the steed, crept close, and smiled, embracing him,
And, pillow'd on his neck, kissing the pure white hair,
Clasp'd Adalmar the brand, and tried to say a prayer,
And that he conquering died, wishing all men to know,
Set firm his lips, and turn'd his face towards the foe,
And closèd eyes, and slept, and never woke again.

Roland is dead, the gentle knight! dead is the crown of men!

THE SCAITH O' BARTLE:

A TALE OF THE NORTH-EAST COAST.

Fathoms deep the ship doth lie,
    Wreath'd with ocean weed and shell,
The cod slips past with round white eye,
Still and deep the shadows lie,
    Dusky as a forest dell:
Tangled in the twisted sail,
    With the breathing of the Sea,
Stirs the Man who told this tale,
    Staring upward dreamilie.

I LAID him here, and scarcely wept; but look!
    His grave is green and wild and like a wave,
And strewn with ocean-weeds instead o' flowers.

You saw him, Jack, langsyne, on board the *Crow*,
Cod-fishing in Newfoundland, and (you mind?)

We drank a gill, all three, the very day
Before the *Crow* went down off Baker's Head,
And all the crew were drown'd but brother Dan.
To think a man who faced so many a storm,
And stood on splitting planks and never quail'd,
And swam to save his life a dozen times,
Should ever die ashore! Why, from the first,
We twins were meant for sailors:—God himself
Planted a wind in both our brains to blow
Our bodies up and down His calms and storms.
Never had wilder, stormier year been known
Here in the clachan, than the very year
When Dan and I were born;—waters and winds
Roar'd through the wintry season, and the sounds
And sights weigh'd on our Highland mother's heart,
Giving her whims and moods in which the bairns
Beneath her heart were fashion'd; and in March,
The Scaith came down the valley, roaring past
Our mother's ears the hour we grat and saw.
Ay! we were made to sail the seas, and hear
The battling of the waters and the winds,
And should have sail'd the seas until the end.
Green fields and wimpling streams and inglesides
Were never meant for cairds like Dan and I.

When other boys were mumping at the school,
Or yellowing their white livers at a desk,
I went as cabin-lad on board a whaler,
And Dan took his big handkerchief, tied up
His sark and comb and brush, and two or three
Big home-baked bannocks, and a lump of cheese,
Kiss'd mother, (that 's her grave beside his own,)
And walk'd to Aberedden, where he found
A berth on board a brig—the *Jessie Gray*,
Bound south for Cadiz. After that, for years
We drifted up and down;—and when we met
Down in the Clyde, and journey'd home together,
We both were twenty, Dan was poor as ever,
But I had saved. How changed he look'd! how fine!
Brown cheek and bit o' whisker, hands like steel,
A build as sturdy as a mountain fir's,—
Ay, every inch a sailor! Then, the tales
We had for one another!—tales of storms,
And sights on land, pranks play'd and places seen!—
But, "Bob, I 'm tired of being on the seas,
The life 's a hard one at the best," says Dan;
And I was like a fool, and thought the same.
So home we came, found father dead and gone,
And mother sorely push'd; and round her neck

We threw our arms, and kiss'd her, and she cried,
And we cried too, and I took out my pay
And pour'd it in her lap; and Dan look'd grieved
And, glancing from the pay to mother, cried,
"I'll never, never go to sea again!"

'Tis thirty years ago, and yet right well
I mind it all. How pleasant for a time
Was life on land: the tousling with the girls,
The merry-making in the public-house,
The cosy bed on winter nights. We work'd—
I at the fishing, Dan at making nets—
And kept old mother for a year and more.
But ere the year was out, the life grew dull:
We never heard the wind blow, but we thought
Of sailing on the sea,—we got a knack
Of lying on the beach and listening
To the great waters. Still, for mother's sake,
Ashore we had to tarry. By and by,
The restlessness grew worse, and show'd itself
In other ways,—taking a drop too much,
Fighting and cutty-stooling—and the folk
Began to shake their heads. Amid it all,
One night when Dan was reading out God's Book,

(That bit about the storm, where Peter tries
To walk on water, and begins to sink,)
Old mother sigh'd and seem'd to go to sleep,
And when we tried to wake her, she was dead.

With sore, sore hearts we laid poor mother down;
And walk'd that day up yonder cliffs, and lay
A-hearkening to the sea that wash'd beneath:
Far, far away we saw a sail gleam wet
Out of a rainy spot below the line
Where sky and water meet; the sea was calm,
And overhead went clouds whose shadows floated
Slowly beneath, and here and there were places
Purple and green and blue, and close to land
The red-sail'd fish-boats in a violet patch.
I look'd at brother Dan, Dan look'd at me,—
And that same morning, off we went again!

No rest for us on land from that day forth.
We grew to love the waters; they became
Part of our flesh and blood: the Sea, the Sea,
The busy whistling round the foam-girt world,
Was all our pleasure. Now and then we met,—
Once in a year or two, and never came

To Scotland, but we took a journey here
To look on mother's grave, and spend a day
With old companions. But we never thought
Of resting long, and never hoped to die
Ashore, like mother: we had fix'd it, Jack,
That we must drown some day. At last, by luck,
We ran together. Dan had got a place
As captain of a brig, and, press'd by him,
They made me mate. Ten years we sail'd together,
From Liverpool to New South Wales and back;
And we were lads no more, but staid, strong men,
Forty and upward,—yet with kibble arms,
Brown cheeks, and cheerful hearts. Then the ill wind
That blew no good to any one began,
And puff'd us back to Scotland, to this place
Where we were born and bred.

Now, mark you, Jack,
Even a sailor is but flesh and blood,
Though out upon the water he can laugh
At women and their ways: a run on shore,
A splash among the dawties and the drink,
Soon tires, soon tires,—then hey! away again
To the wild life that 's worthy of a man!

At forty, though, a sailor should be wise,
And 'ware temptation: whole a sailor, free,
But only half a sailor, though afloat,
When wedded. Don't you guess? Though Dan was old,
His head was turn'd, while in the clachan here,
And by a woman,—Effie Paterson,
The daughter of a farmer on the hills,
And only twenty. Bonnie, say you? Ay!
As sweet a pout as ever grew on land;
But soft and tender, with a quiet face,
That needed the warm hearth to light it up,
And went snow-pallid at a puff of wind
Or whiff of danger. When I saw the trap,
I tried my best to wheedle Dan away,
Back to the brig; but, red as ricks on fire,
He glinted dark with those deep eyes of his,
And linger'd. Then, 'twas nearly time to sail;
I talk'd of going, and it all came out:
He meant to marry, Jack!—and not content
With marrying, he meant to stop ashore!

Why, if a lightning flash had split our brig,
I should have wonder'd less. But, "Bob," says he,
"I love this lassie as I never thought

'Twas in my heart to love; and I have saved;
And I am tired of drifting here and there
On the great waters: I have earn'd my rest,
And mean to stop ashore until I die."
'Twas little use to argue things with Dan
When he had settled aught within his mind;
So all I said was vain. What could I do
But put a sunny face upon it all,
And bid him hasten on the day, that I
Might see his wedding, and be off again.

Yet soon I guess'd, before the wedding day,
That Effie did not care a cheep for Dan,
But scunner'd at his brave rough ways and tales
Of danger on the deep. His was a voice
Meant for the winds, with little power to whisper
The soft sleek things that make the women blush,
And tingle, and look sweet. Moreover, Dan
Was forty, and the lassie but a child.
I saw it all, but dared not speak my thought!
For Dan had siller, Effie's folks were poor,
And Dan was blind, and Effie gave consent,
And talk was no avail. The wedding guests
Went up to Jessie's home one pleasant day,

The minister dropp'd in, the kirk-bells rang,
And all was over. 'Twas a summer morn,
The blue above was fleck'd with feathery down,
The sea was smooth, and, like a ringdove's neck,
Changeful and full of colours, and the kirk
Stood mossy here upon the little hill,
And seem'd to ring a blessing over all.

And Effie? Ah! keep me from women, Jack!
Give them a bit o' sunshine—and they smile,
Give them a bit o' darkness—and they weep;
But smiles and tears with them are easy things,
And cheat ye like the winds. On such a day,
With everybody happy roundabout,
Effie look'd happy too; and if her face
Flush'd and was fearful, that was very joy;
For when a woman blushes, who can tell
Whether the cause be gladness, pride, or shame?
And Dan (God bless him!) look'd as young as you,
Trembled and redden'd lass-like, and I swear,
Had he not been a sailor, would have cried.
So I was cheer'd, next day, when off I went
To take his post as captain of the brig,
And I forgot my fears, and thought them wrong,

And went across the seas with easy heart,
Thinking I left a happy man behind.

But often, out at sea, I thought of Dan,
Wonder'd if he was happy. When the nights
Were quiet, and the cabin where I slept
Was steaming with the moonshine, I would lie
And listen to the lapping of the waves,
And think: "I wonder if this very light
Is shining far away on poor old Dan?
And if his face looks happy in it, while
He sleeps by Effie's side?" On windy nights
I used to think of Dan with trouble and fear;
And often, when the waves were ribb'd and white,
And on we drove bare-poled before the wind,
The foamy waters seem'd to take the shape
Of this old clachan, and I seem'd to hear
Dan calling me; and I would drink the salt,
And pace the deck with all my blood on fire,
And cry—"If Dan were driving on out here,
Dashing and weather-beaten, never still,
He would be happier!"

Ay! though the storm

Roll'd fierce between us, voices came from Dan
To tell me he was weary of the land.
Often, when I was floating in the ship,
He hung about these caves and watch'd the moon
Silv'ring the places where no wind was blowing,
And thought of me! or on the beach he lay,
And wearied to the breaking of the waves!
Or out from land he row'd his boat, and gazed
Wistfully eastward! or on windy nights
He speel'd yon cliffs above the shore, and set
His teeth together in the rain and wind,
Straining eyes seaward, seeking lights at sea,
And pacing up and down upon the brinks
As if he trode the decks! Why, things like those
Saved him from withering, salted all his blood,
And soothed his heartache. Wind and wave are far
More merciful than a young woman's heart.

Why, had she been a bickering hizzie, fill'd
With fire and temper, stubborn as a whin,
And cushlingmushling o'er a cheerless fire,
Dan might have brought her round: that was the work
He understood full well; and, right or wrong,
He would have been the skipper to the end.

But though a man who has been train'd at sea,
Holding a hard strong grip on desperate men,
Can sink his voice and play a gentle part
In sunny seasons, he has little power
To fight with women's weapons. Dan, be sure,
Loved Effie with a love the deeper far
And tenderer because he had been bred
On the rough seas; but when, from day to day,
He met a weary and a waning face,
That tried to smile, indeed, but could not smile,
And saw the tears where never tears should be,
Yet never met an angry look or word,
What could he do? He loved the lass too well
To flyte; tried tender words, but they were spent
Upon a heart where the cold crancreuch grew;
And, when the sorrow grew too sharp to dree,
Turn'd soopit from the dwelling. Plain he saw
The lass was dreary, though she kept so still,
And loved him not, though nothing harsh was said,
But fretted, and grew thin, and haunted him
With a pale face of gentleness and blame.
O Jack, Jack, Jack, of all the things accurst,
Worse than a shipwreck on a savage coast,
Worse than a tempest and the rocks ahead,

Is dismal cloudy weather and dead calm!
Homeless and sad and troubled by her face,
If Dan had let his heart and brain keep still,
Let the damp mildew settle on his heart,
He would have shrunk into a wretched thing
The rains might beat on, and the winds might lash,
And ne'er have had the heart to stand erect,
And set his teeth, and face them, and subdue.
What could he do, but try to ease his birn
By haunting yonder beach, and glorying
In stormy seasons, thinking of the life
He used to lead, with ocean-sound for ever
Making a second life within his blood,
Thinking of me, and feeling that his heart
Was help'd a bit by his old friend the Sea?

And Effie Widdershins, from day to day,
Turn'd from the happy shining of the sun,
In wanrest and in tears; and poor old Dan
Dree'd bitterly the dreary life in hand.
No stanchgrass ever heal'd a wound so deep.

'Twas comfort dwelling in so wild a place,
So near to open water; but for that,

I do not think he could have borne to dwell
Pining ashore. His trouble grew and grew:
No corsy-belly warm'd at Effie's fire,
No doctor's watch tick'd by the jizzen-bed,
No sound of tiny footfalls fill'd the house
With happy cheer; the dull and lifeless mood
Grew on the wife; her sense of shame seem'd gone;
She paid no heed to dress, or to the house,
But wearied, like a pale-faced, listless flower,
Grown in a weedy garden. Then, indeed,
To see all household ties neglected so,
The crowsfeet gathering round Effie's eyes,
The ingleside so dreary and so cold,
Dan clench'd his fists, and storm'd with thunder-voice;
But Effie only trembled, and was still,
Or threw her apron o'er her face and wept;
And Dan, who never in his life could bear
To see a woman greet, pleaded and begg'd,—
Without avail. Then many and many a night
He roam'd the silent cliffs till peep of day,
Or join'd the fishers, out upon the sea;
And many and many a night he thought he heard
My voice a-calling him. One night of storm,
When the sky murmur'd, and the foamy sea

Flash'd in the fireflaught round the shadowy cliffs,
He fix'd to run away; but could not go,
Until he gazed on Effie's face once more;
And when he stole into her room unheard,
He saw her sleeping with a happy smile,
So still, so sweet, so bonnie in her dream,
So like the shining lass she used to be,
That his heart fail'd, he swaver'd forth again,
And lay upon the waterside and wept,
And though the wind was whistling in his eyes,
And the still fireflaught whiten'd all the sea,
He felt o'er weak, o'er gentle, and o'er sad,
To quit her in the little cottage here,
And leave the little lamp that lit her face
Many and many a stormy mile behind,
And dree again the darkness of the deep.

The house is yonder—ay, the red-tiled house,
With little patch of garden. Mark the pool
Of water at the door. Beyond you see
The line of boats, drawn high and dry, and yonder
The dull, green water, with the purple stain
Out eastward, and the sunlight peeping through
Upon a sail. Mark how the clachan lies

Down in the gully, with the barren hills,
Where never ran-tree waves its silver hair,
On either side. Look backward, now! The glen,
Hollow'd between the hills, goes inland, far
As eye can see,—with yellow pools of rain,
And cattle looking shadowy in the mists
Upon the slopes. How still and dull looks all!
'Tis plain you gather, with a sailor's eye,
The danger. When the rains have lasted long,
The yellow waters (rightly christen'd here
The Scaith o' Bartle) gather up the glen,
Suck in the strength of flying mist and cloud,
And, bursting from the hollows where they meet,
Rush seaward, with a roaring like the sea,
O'erwhelming all. Thrice has the mischief come
In one-and-twenty years.

When I came home,
A month ago, and walk'd across the hills
From Cardy town, I paused on yonder cliffs,
And saw the clachan lying at my feet,—
The setting sun shining upon the house
Where Dan was dwelling. Nought was alter'd there!
The very punts and fish-boats just the same

As when I quitted. While I stood and gazed,
I saw a stooping figure with a staff,
Standing hard by me on the cliffs, and gazing
Wistfully seaward. As I look'd, he turn'd,
And though the face was haggard, worn, and old,
And every hair upon the head was gray,
And the fresh strength about the limbs was gone,
I knew old Dan, and, shouting blithely, ran
To hug him to my heart; and he turn'd white,
Shaking like straw in wind, to find 'twas me.
Then, when the shock was over, and we talk'd,
He brighten'd,—as a bit of snow turns bright
When shone on. But my heart was shock'd and sore!
He was the ghost of what he once had been;
His voice was broken, and his welcome seem'd
Like one's who, sinking to the slumber, smiles
To see a face he loves before he dies;
And when his air grew cheerier, and at last
His love for me came brighter on his look,
His cheeriness seem'd sadder far than all.
Swavering down the path, he took my arm,
Leant heavily on his staff, as if he dream'd,
Talk'd of old times, and friends alive and dead,
Until we halted at his cottage door;

And, while he lifted up the latch, he cast
His eyes to windward, read the weather signs,
After old habit, ere he enter'd in.

Effie was there,—changed too; she welcomed me,
Moved but and ben the house with a light step,
And smiled a wee: all women have a smile,
A happiness, a kind of second self,
Kept for fresh faces. Yet I saw full soon
The bield was homeless; little love was there;
Ah, that was common crack aroundabout!
The first flush faded soon from Effie's face,
Leaving it dull and wan; she moved about
Like a sick lassie risen from a dream;
And aft, when we were seated in the lowe,
She started, and her colour went and came;
And though her features wore a kind of fear,
There was a light of youth there: she would keek
At Dan, whose eyes were steady on the fire,
Hang o'er her knitting, breathing deep, and then
Hearken and hearken, till the soft bright blush
Died by degrees, her face became composed
To pallor, and the light had gone away,
Leaving her sick and soopit once again.

At last, when we were smoking in the bield
One dull day in November, Dan arose
And took his stick, and beckoning me went out,
I follow'd; and he never spake a word,
But gript me by the arm, and walk'd along,
Until we left the clachan far behind,
And took a path that winded up the hills.
For many weeks, at intervals, the rain
Had fallen; and the hills were dreeping damp,
And down their sides ran many burns new-born,
Making an eerie murmur. Far away
Ben Callachan was glimmering through a mist,
And all round Bartle rose a dewy steam
Silent and gray, with cattle here and there
Dismally looming; here and there a gull
Blowing to seaward. Still and dull was all,
So still, so still; only the faint sharp stir
That is a sound, but seems a click within
The ear itself; save when from far away
A cow would low, and echoes faint and sad
Died inland, or when blowing on the wind
A cry came from the sea, whose waves we saw,
Beyond us, breaking in a shadowy cloud,
With gleams of glittering foam. But Dan walk'd on,

Scarce heeding ought; and yet his sailor's eye
Took in the signs, and glinted up and down
With the old cunning; but his heart was full,
His voice was broken like a greeting wean's,
And as we went along he told me all.

All that you ken! but somewhat more—a thought
Of later growth, a nettle in his heart—
That Effie was not true, as wives should be;
Not that, while keeping care beneath her cloak,
She carried consolation 'neath her sark;
That would have meant a bloody deed with Dan;
But that her happiest thoughts were fallen things
That clung around a fresh young kimmer's knees.
I stared at Dan, and hearken'd in amaze!
His grip was tight upon my arm, his face
White as the snow on Callachan, his voice
Shrill as a seagull's shriek; and all at once
He waved his arms, turn'd his wild face away,
And cried aloud with a full heart—"O God!
Why did I ever cease to sail the sea?"

I tried to cheer him; 'twas but useless work,
Stirring a muddy pool with bonnie flowers!

I tried to argue with him—he was dumb!
And yet I saw, had I been daft enough
To echo him, he would have hated me.
He only half believed the things he said,
And would have turn'd in wrath on any man
Who could believe them true, and say the same.
He loved the braxie still, as few can love,
Save the good Shepherd, who has love for all!
Could not have tholed to hear another's mouth
Condemn her! blamed himself for all his grief!
And gladly would have died beneath her feet,
To win one word, one kiss, one shining look,
To show his love had not been quite in vain!

But on we fared, so fill'd with our own thoughts,
We scarcely saw how far away we wander'd,
How mirk all grew, how close the gathering clouds
Drew to the hill-tops, while the cattle raised
Their heads into the dismal air and cried.
Then, suddenly, there came a lightning flash
That for a moment lighted up the hills,
The far-off cliffs, and the white lines of foam,
And faded,—to a sound as if the earth
And heavens were torn asunder. Soon the storm

Deepen'd—the thunder and the lightning came
Ofter than dark or silence; and I felt
Far less myself on those dull endless heights,
Than seeing, hearing, from my ship at sea.
But Dan said little; only, as the drops
Of rain began to fall, he led the way
Into a mountain shieling, roof'd with peat,
Where we in shelter cowried, and talk'd on
Of his dull ingleside, his cheerless days,
How his heart gizzen'd looking from the land,
The terror and the pain he had to dree,
And "all I care for now is ended, Bob!
I want to die, but not to leave the wife
Untended and unhappy. After all,
I cannot blame her for her crancreuch face,—
She is so young—mid-cild is past with me—
Be sure that she would love me if she could!"
And then he glower'd out on the dark, and groan'd,
"Would I were in my grave!—would I were doom'd
Among the waves!—would I were far out yonder,
Praying and sinking in a boat at sea!"

And I was silent; but the elements
Made answer. With a clash like iron fell

The headlong torrent of the soot-dark clouds,
Drowning the thunders with its dreesome cry,
Birming above, around, and smiting earth
With strength of stone. Never for many a year
Had such a fall been known: it seem'd the Lord
Unlocking all His waters to destroy
The bad world o'er again. No rainbow there
To promise sunshine and a speedy end!
For 'twas the Black Rain, which had once or twice
Gone southward, making frighted elders groan,
Caught ruffling cockernonies after prayers,
And which old wives in Bartle often call
The "Deil's rain," thinking Satan flies himself,
Dropping the sooty blackness from above.
Silent we cowried, watching, and the air
Was full of a great roar—the earth beneath
Seem'd shaking—and the torrent forced a way
Through the thick turf above our heads, and fell
Upon us, splashing, as with watery ink,
Our hands and faces. But I saw Dan's eye
Had kindled. He was younger. For the sounds
Quicken'd his sense of life, brought up his heart,
And minded him of former fearsome days
Upon the ocean; and his other self—

The weary self that lived the life on land—
Forsook him. Then there was a lull, a pause—
Not broken by the further fall of rain,
Nor by the thunder-claps, but by a sign
More terrible than all—a roar, a groan,
A motion as of waters, and a sound
Like the dread rushing of an angry sea.

And Dan threw up his arms, screaming aloud,
"THE SCAITH! THE SCAITH!"—and groan'd, and rush'd away,
I following close behind him in the mirk.

And on he rush'd, until he gain'd a craig,
Above the glen, yonder between the hills;
And cattle huddled round him, lowing loud,
And the Scaith thicken'd, and the murmur grew,
While we gazed down. The mists hung round the heights,
The rain still fell, but softly,—and below,
Roaring on seaward, snatching in its course
Boulders and trees and cattle, rush'd the Scaith,
A blacken'd yellow rush of waters, foaming
Where'er it touch'd the feet of craig or steep,

And dizzily whirling round the great tree-roots
To twist them from their beds. White, scared, and
stunn'd,
Dan groan'd, and sank upon his knees, and wept.
Done was the thunder; but the waters made
Another thunder, and the fireflaught came
Fainter and fainter. Then we heard from far
A sound more awful—shrieks of living men,
Children and women; while the thinning clouds
Parted to westward, brightening at the rims,
And rays of misty sunset slanted down
On Bartle, and the Scaith had seized its prey.

"Effie!" cried Dan; and sped along the hills,
And would have rush'd right downward to his death
Had I not gript him. But we found a way
O'er the hillside, and gain'd the northern height
Above the clachan. Jack, until I die,
That hour will haunt me! For the clachan lay
Naip-deep beneath the moaning rain-dyed flood,
And bields sank shatter'd, and the sunset cold
Gleam'd upon Bartle and the sea beyond;
And on the slopes on either side there gather'd
Women and men: some screeching as they saw

The Scaith drink up their houses and their goods,
Some crying for the friends they could not see,
Some sitting still, and looking on their bairns,
As if they had gone wild. Then Dan glared round,
Seeking for Effie,—but he saw her not;
And the damp sunset gleaming on his face,
Grimed with the sooty rain-drops, ghastlied it,
But he was cool as he had often been
On gruesome nights at sea. "She is not here!"
He whisper'd; "yet she cannot but be saved;
Perchance she gathers with the folk that stand
Waving their arms yonder across the flood:
Oh, would my eyes were young, that I might see."
That way I gazed; but all that I could see
Were mists beyond the clachan; down below,
The slow-subsiding waters; here and there
Women and children screaming on the naips,
While punts and fish-boats glided here and there,
Piloting slowly through the rocks and walls,
To succour those unsaved; at intervals
A leafless tree-top peering through the water,
While frighted birds lit on its twigs, or wheel'd
Around it crying. Then, "A boat! a boat!"
Dan cried; but he was crying to the air:

The folk around him heard and made a stir,—
But some scarce raised their wild and greeting eyes,
And some stopp'd moaning, look'd at him who cried,
And then again sat rocking to and fro,
Gazing straight downward, and with eerie groans
Bewailing their own sorrow.

Then the place
Blacken'd in gloaming—mists rose from the flood—
The sky turn'd black, with neither stars nor moon,
And down below, flashing from place to place,
The lights, like corpse-lights warning folk of death,
Flitted and faded, showing where the boats
Still moved about upon their weary work;
And those who grieved were stiller all around;
And the deep moaning of the Scaith was hush'd,
And you could hear the breaking of the Sea;
And only now and then a hollow splash
Spake plain of walls that yielded and slipt down
Into the waters. Then a light came near,
And to the water's edge a fishing-boat
Brought a dead fisher, and a greeting wean
Who cried for "mither;" and as he who row'd
Handed the bairn to hungry outstretch'd arms,

And landed with the corpse, old Dan leapt in,
Snatching the lanthorn from the fisher's hand,
Push'd off ere I could follow, and was gone
Into the darkness. . . .

Jack,—I never again
Saw poor old Dan, alive! Yet it was well
His days were ended; for that very day,
Ere the Scaith came, Effie had flown from home.—
Ay, with another man;—and ere I knew
The truth, why, she was out upon the waves,
And fleeing with the loon to Canada.
Ill winds pursue her! God will find her out!
He sent His water down to free old Dan,
And He is after her across the deep!

Next dawning, when the water was subdued,
And sinking slowly through the cracks of earth,
Pouring in deep brown burns to join the sea,
Fouling with mud the line of breaking foam,
It was a piteous sight to watch the folk,
With spade and mattock, digging at the graves
Of their own dwellings; taking what was saved
With bitter thankless faces. Fallen walls,

And trees uprooted from the waste hillsides,
And boulders swept from far along the glen,
And household lumber gather'd everywhere,
Mingled in ruin; and the frailer bields
Were swept away for ever. As for me,
I had my work in hand. I took a spade
And waded through the thick and muddy pool,
('Twas still knee-deep,) right onward to the place
Where Dan had dwelt. For something drew me there,
Foremost of all. The bield was standing still,
Though doors and windows had been beaten in;
And as I splash'd along the passage, bits
Of household lumber tripped me; but I went
Right on to Effie's room, and there the flood
Was lying deep and cold; and there lay Dan.

Drifting upon the water, with his face
Turn'd downward, his hands clench'd, his long gray hair
Floating around him—stiff, and cold, and dead!
And when I turn'd his face up to the light,
I did not scunner much, it look'd so strong,
And seaman-like, and fine. I saw it all!
How he had drifted thither in the mirk,

And found the water low around the bield,
But slowly rising; how he fought his way,
Search'd but and ben, and last, in Effie's room,
Stood ghastly in the lanthorn light, and saw
The place was toom; and how, while there he stood,
Staring in horror, with an eldritch cry
The wild Scaith struck the crashing window panes,
Dash'd down the lanthorn, gript him in the dark,
Roar'd in his ears; and while it struck him down,
Out of his nostrils suck'd the breath of life.
Jack, Jack, we know there comes to men who
drown
A sudden flashing vision of their life,—
And ah! how pitiful, how pitiful,
Remembrance came, that minute ere he died:
A vision of the sounding sea afar,
A ghaistly ship upon it,—Effie's face,
Coming and going like to floating foam,—
The picture of the kirk upon the hill,
And sunshine glittering on the wedding guests,—
The shadowy cliffs where he had paced in pain,
The waves, the sun, the moon, the thought of me,
All thicken'd on him as he scream'd her name,
And struggled with the cruel Scaith, and died!

Ay! God Almighty's water, e'en ashore,
More merciful than women, found him out;
And here he lies, but should have lain elsewhere.
Had Scots law, and the blethering women's tongues,
Not hinder'd, Jack,—I would have ta'en a boat,
And sewn his body in a sheet, with stones
Fasten'd beneath his feet to sink him down,
And row'd out yonder, westward, where the sun
Dips red beneath the straight blue line of sea,
And said a prayer, and softly sent him down
Where he could sleep in peace, and hear for ever
The washing of the waters through the deeps:
With flag-weeds o'er his head, great weeds all round,
And white salt foam-bells hanging in his ears,
His would have been a sailor's sleep indeed!
But as it is, he slumbers here on land,
In shade of Bartle Kirk, 'mong country loons
And fishermen that screech at open sea.

THE GLAMOUR.

> The hills close round her—everywhere
> Strange voices deepen in the air;
> The pain, the hope, the agony,
> Flash to a sense of mystery;
> The shapes of earth and air and skies
> Catch glamour in her weary eyes:
> Worn with the pain, worn with the pain,
> She would lie down, and sleep again!

O LORD my God, draw now Thy hand away—
The sleep-stoure fills my eyes—I feel my grave—
And I would reach a painless end, like those
Thy glamour ne'er hath troubled. I have been
O'er long a shadow on the paths of men,
O'er long a screeching bird in happy bields,
O'er long a haunted wanderer day and night.
Lord, let me die! Lord, let me die! Lord God,

Pity and spare me! Draw Thy hand away!
Thy breath is on me in the mirk, and ah!
I sicken sore, while yonder through the pane
Corpse-candles, blowing blue against the wind,
Flit slowly to the kirkyard, down Glen-Earn.

What had I done, that Thou should pick me out,
To breathe thy glamour on? I was a lass
Happy and heartsome, till that dreesome day
I walk'd from kirk by moonlight down the glen,
And saw Maccaskill of Craig-Dhonil pass,
Sewn to the middle in his winding-sheet,
And waving hairy arms until I swoon'd;—
And ere a year was run Maccaskill died;
And then I kenn'd I had the bitter gift
My father and my father's father had.
Yet I was young, and felt a kind o' pride,
To see so far into Thy mysteries,—
To ken when man or wife was doom'd to die;
To see the young life in a lassie's wame,
Although her snood was whole; to prophesy
Tempests and human losses. Many a man
Then turn'd away; but Kenneth married me—
Kenneth Macdonald, sheep-herd on the hills,

A holy man and kind; and for a time
The glamour came no more, and I was gay,
Feeling the young bairn underneath my breast
Breathe softly with the rocking o' my heart.
But in the winter gloaming, when the drift
Was thick around the door, and winds were blowing,
And I was lying on the jizzen-bed,
And Jean the howdie wash'd my paps with salt,
I saw a strange thing lying on her knee—
A span-long body in a blood-stain'd sowe—
And scream'd, and cried, "Jean, Jean, the bairn will
die!"
And so it was. For while old mother slipt
Out to the kitchen lowe, where Kenneth sat,
To drop a cinder through the wee white sark,
The bairn came dead into the chilly mirk;
And in the snowy dawing I beheld
The span-long body of my sweet first-born,
Wrapt in its sowe, upon the howdie's knee.

But *Angus* lived—my white-faced sickly bairn,
The last I bore; for, ere I rose from bed,
I heard, one gloaming dark, from but the house,
A sound of sawing, hewing with an adze,

Mix'd with a sound of weeping, clapping hands;
And all the bield was empty,—and I knew
A shell was being made for some one near;
And ah! before the moon was full again
Just as the season of the lambing came,
My bonnie man was sheeted in the house,
And stiff, and cold; and I was left alone,
Shadow'd and sad, with hot tears dropping down
On Angus, pulling feebly at my breast.

I never bedded with another man,
Never bare wean again; but I could earn
Both food and drink, and all my pride and joy
Was Angus. Lord, he was the bonniest bairn
The sweetest, gentlest, ever wrought in flesh,
To gladden mother's eyes. The very day
That he was born, I call'd the minister,
Who gave him baptism, that the glamour ne'er
Might come on him or his; and ah! he grew,
Pale like a lily—for this solemn world
O'er gentle; and the glamour brought no fear
To mirk our dwelling. Nay, for many a year,
The eerie light seem'd gone away from me,
For never ghaist or burial cross'd my path,

Corpse-light or wraith. Then Angus on the hills
Grew sheep-herd, like his father, though he lack'd
His father's fearless heart; and, as he grew,
Turn'd weaker, whiter—bonnie still, but thin
And bloodless; and he lack'd the heart to face
Darkness and danger: ringing of a bell
At midnight, sudden footsteps in the dark,
A hand placed on his shoulder suddenly,
Would strike him down into a swooning fit,
Dreesome to see; and when his eighteenth year
Was o'er, he sometimes sicken'd at my face,
And shiver'd though he knew me. All at once
The glamour came across my Soul again.
One night, while we were seated in the bield,
I heard a wailing come from but the house,
And horror gript me. "Mother!" Angus cried,
Glow'ring full fear'd into my burning eyes,
"What ails thee?" "Wheesht!" I whisper'd; "hear
ye nought?"
"Nought!" Angus said. And then I heard a sound
Of groans, and clapping hands; and suddenly
I saw my Angus shrink until he grew
As small as any babe new-born, and turn,
Swift as the fireflaught, to himself again;—

And while I scream'd, and fell upon his neck,
Weeping, and kissing him, and moaning low,
He sicken'd at my face, and swoon'd away.

For, though I hid the trouble from my bairn,
Long had he known his mother was a seer,
Whose eyes were troubled by mysterious things;
And every shade he saw upon my face
Distraught him, lest I saw before his path
Mishap or death. My white-faced, fearful bairn!
My drooping Angus, with his soft, wide eyes,
And fluttering mouth! Alone upon the hills,
He trembled—fear'd the lightning and the storm—
Tholed not to lie within the dark alone—
And would have wither'd in his bairndom's time,
Had I not cheer'd him with a smiling face.

Lord, thou wert sore upon me! I was lone,
And Angus was my pleasure. I was haunted,
And Angus was my help. Yet, once again,
Thy glamour struck me, and I knew, I knew,
Angus must die. Hard, hard, both day and night
I tried to cheat myself and hope, and smiled
On Angus, till his heart grew still once more.

But it was all in vain. Thrice Angus shrunk,
Three several gloamings, seated in his chair.
And I kept down my fear, and did not scream;
And oft I heard the wailing in the house,
And sounding of the kirk-bells down Glen-Earn
At midnight. Then I sicken'd and grew thin,
And hunger'd o'er my bairn, and pray'd, and pray'd,—
And what to me was light of sun or star
If Angus went away?

. . . It was a night
Quiet and cold. The moon and stars were out,
The moon-dew glittering on the hills. Alone,
I sat, awaiting Angus. It grew late,
And Angus came not; and the low winds blew,
And the clock tick'd, and ah! my heart was dark.
Then, last, I took my cloak, and wander'd forth,
To see if he was coming down the Glen,
And took the cold wet pathway in the moon
Until I reach'd the foot of Cawmock Craig,
And saw the straight rock rise into the lift,
Its side all dark, but on its top the Moon
Shining full bright and chilly. As I stood,
I heard a shout, and saw, far, far above,

A figure dark between me and the lift,
Threading the narrow paths around the Craig
Whence many a man hath fallen and been slain;
And even then—Lord, Lord!—thy glamour dropt
Upon me, and I saw before my face
The wraith of Angus wrapt in bloody sowe
Gliding before me in the ghaistly light.
Shrill as an owl, I screech'd!—and up above
My Angus heard, and sicken'd, and swam round,
And, swooning on the sharp edge of the Craig,
Dash'd downward to his death!—

. . . O bonnie, bonnie
Look'd Angus, lying in his sowe asleep,
Quiet like moonlight on his face, his hair
Kaim'd back and shining round his cold white ears.
And yonder in the cold kirkyard he lies;
And, Lord, I want to slumber at his side,
And cheer him in the darkness of the grave,—
For he was ever fearful, weak, and pale—
A young man with a white bairn's timorous soul.
And, Lord, I think that Thou at last art kind,
For oft the white wraith, glimmering at my side,
Hath waved its arms, and moan'd, and look'd like *me*:

And I have watch'd it ever, not afraid,
But sad and smiling; and what dress I wore,
The wraith hath worn; and when I turn'd my gown,
And let the gray hairs hang all down my neck,
The wraith, too, turn'd its gown, and loosed its hair;
And yonder, yonder, yonder, through the pane,
The blue corpse-candles, blowing in the wind,
Flit slowly to the kirkyard, down Glen-Earn.

THE GIFT OF EOS.

Not in a mist of loveless eyes dies he,
  Who loveth truly nobler light than theirs;
To him, nor weariness nor agony,
  Purblind appeals, nor prayers:
To him, the priceless boon
  To watch from heights divine till all be done:
Calm in each dreamy rising of the Moon,
  Glad in each glorious coming of the Sun.

CHORUS OF HOURS.

I.

LO! here at the portal, awaiting new light,
  We linger with pinions dripping dew-light,
Our faces shadow'd, our heads inclining,
The bright star-frost on our tresses shining;

Our eyes turn'd earthward in vigil holy,
Sinking our voices and singing slowly.

2.

The dark Earth sleepeth to our intoning,
The Ocean only is gleaming and moaning;
Our eyelids droop in a still devotion,
Yet we see the skies in the glass of Ocean,—
The void, star-lighted, is mirror'd faintly,
Slow slides the shade of Selene saintly.

3.

Eos! Eos! thou canst not hear us,
Yet we feel thee breathing in slumber near us:
Dark is thy cloud-roof'd temple solemn,
Shadows deepen round arch and column;
But a quiet light streams around thee, lying
In the feeble arms of thy love undying.

4.

Eos! Eos! thy cheek faint-gleaming
Sendeth a joy through the old man's dreaming;
His white hair poureth in frosty showers
Round a wreath fresh-woven of lily flowers,

R

And the flowers are fading and earthward snowing,
Save those thou breathest against unknowing.

TITHONOS.

What low, strange music throbs about my brain?
  I hear a motion as of robes—a moaning.

EOS.

'Tis the three sisters and their shadowy train,
  Beating the right foot solemnly, and intoning.
Ah! weary one, and have thy dreams been ill,
  That thou upheavest thus a face so pale?

TITHONOS.

Methought that I was dead, and cold, and still,
  Deep in the navel of a charmëd dale!
Ah, love, thy gift doth heavy burthen bring,
  Now I grow old, grow old,
And these weird songs the sisters nightly sing
  Haunt me with memories strange and manifold;
For every eve, when Phoibos fades away
  Yonder across Parnassos snow-tipt height,
These halls feel empty, and the courts grow gray,
The sisters lose the radiance of the day;

And thy bright hair fades to a silvern light,
And nothing seems that is not sad though sweet!
But Heaven, this East, yea, and the earth below
Are silenced to the ditties these repeat,
Sinking their voices sad, and singing slow:
Yea, Ocean moans with many waters! sleep
Is troublous even upon eyes that weep!
The monsters of the earth are in their lairs
Moonlit and cold; the owl sits still and stares
Through woody nooks with round white eye; the wind
Breatheth and gropeth blind;
The burthen and the mystery and the dream,
The sense of things that are and yet may be,
The strife between what is and what doth seem,
Is weary then on all, and most on me!

EOS.

It is enough to know thou canst not die,
Like those of whom thou 'plainest, drowsy one!

TITHONOS.

The seasons come and go, the moments fly
Like snow-flakes, falling, melting in the sun.

Nothing abideth—all must change—the earth
  Puts on fresh raiment every dawn of day—
What seems most precious turns to little worth—
Our love, whose face was an auroral birth,
  Steps in the shade an instant,—and is clay.
Is it enough to know I cannot die?
  Further than deathless life, can I implore?
Ah, but to know, as the slow years sweep by,
  That life is worthy to be lived, is more.
Wherefore the burthen and the dream below?
Wherefore the happiness, the hope, the woe?
Wherefore the slimy sense of evil things
  That draws the adder round the young man's eyes?
Wherefore the yearnings and imaginings,
  The songs of bards, the broodings of the wise?
Have the gods written only on their scroll:
  "Man striveth merely for a little space,—
Then there is slumber, and the death-bells toll,
  The children cry, the widow hides her face,
The foolish dream is o'er,
And all is done for ever evermore?"
Oh, wherefore life at all, if life be such,—
  A joy, a weariness, a growing gray!
If life be more, how may man live too much?

EOS.

Nothing, be sure, can wholly pass away.

HOURS.

Crow's-nest on a yew-tree, swing slow in sad weather,
There's a lock o' wet hair pastes thy brown sides together!—
Blood-red were her lips, till she paled and grew thin,
As the pink under-eyelid of snakes was her skin.
Crow's-nest on a yew-tree that grows on a tomb,
The little black fledglings croak low in the gloom;
O maiden below, canst thou hear how they cry?
Dost thou stir in thy sleep as the adder goes by?
A worm crawl'd away with the little gold ring
He placed on thy finger that summer morning;
Then thy hand became bone, then was turn'd into clay,
While thy heart wither'd slowly; but cheerly, to-day
Thy fingers are leaves on the tree, in whose shade
He sits with as tender a maid!

TITHONOS.

Of death, corruption, change, and mystery,
They chant their chime to which the old world sleeps!

Why not for ever stand they bright and free,
  Flinging a glad song over dales and deeps,
As morn by morn they do, when from my breast
  With rosy footsteps thou dost bright'ning go,
Blue-wingëd, to Parnassos?

Eos.

Be at rest!
  The sense of things is dark on these also;
And e'en immortal gods grow pale at times
To hear their world-old rhymes.
Yea, Zeus the Sire himself beholds and hears,
  Stares vacantly into the blue profound,
What time a rainbow drawn from all earth's tears
  Fades on Olumpos with a weeping sound!

Tithonos.

What then remains, my soul, if this be so?

Eos.

  Around my neck I wind thy beard of gray,
And kiss thy quivering eyelids till they glow,
  And thy face lightens on me, and I say,
"Look in mine eyes and know!"

Hours.

O clod of green mould, that wast lately a man,
Time was, thou wert footsore and weary and wan,
When thy brain was as fire, when thine eyes were as lead,
When thy hair was as white as the bones of the dead!
Dust in the urn, on a shelf, in a shrine,
Hast thou ears, hast thou eyes, canst thou feel, or divine?
Bones in the ground, can ye guess what ye be?
Brain, in the midst of the bones, canst thou see?
Corse, in a clod-gown clammy with dew,
Skull, with a hole where the arrow went through,
Do ye dream, are ye troubled, remember ye there
The life and the light that ye were?

Tithonos.

Thine eyes are lit with passion strong enew
To melt a mortal's heart to fiery dew!
The burthen and the wonder and the dream,
Yea, all I am or was, and all I seem,
Are dwarf'd within these liquid orbs of thine
To the blue shadow of a love divine!

Yea, sweetest, love is surest, truest, best!
And dearest, knowing it must last for long!

Eos.

Now, close thine eyes, lean heavy on my breast,
And let my lips rain over thee in song!—
Thou wert a mortal who with fearless eyes
Dared seek the love of an immortal thing;
Plead low thou didst, and strive and agonise,
Yet time ebb'd on, and little peace did bring;
And the immortal joy seem'd far away,
Lessening and lessening to a speck of gold
Against the gates of sunrise,—till that day
I came upon thee where thou sleeping lay,
Breathed smoothness on thy wrinkled forehead old,
And woke thee to these wondrous halls, from whence
Thou seest the glimmering tract of earth below,
And trancëd thee to nuptials so intense
Thy flesh and blood seem'd melting off like snow,
Leaving thy soul in its eternal hues
Clear, strong, and pale, as yonder crystal sphere
That swings above my threshold, sprinkling dews
Immortal over all who enter here!—

And still thy corporal semblance ages on,
  Thy hair dries up, thy bones grow chill and bare.
A little while, my love, and all is gone,
  Drunk by the lips of a diviner air!

TITHONOS.

Ah woe! ah woe!—and I am lost for aye!

EOS.

Nothing, be sure, can wholly pass away!
  And nothing suffers loss if love remains!
The motion of mine air consumes thy clay,
My breath dries up the moisture of thy veins;
Yet have I given thee immortal being,
  Thereto immortal love, immortal power,
Consuming thy base substance till thy seeing
  Grows clearer, brighter, purer, hour by hour;—
Immortal honour, too, is thine, for thou
  Hast sought the highest meed the gods can give—
Immortal Love hath stoop'd to kiss thy brow!
  Immortal Love hath smiled, and bade thee live!
Wherefore the gods have given thee mighty meed,
  And snatch'd thee from the death-pyres of thy
    race,

To wear away these weary mortal weeds
  In a serener and a purer place,—
Not amid warriors on a battle plain,
  Not by the breath of pestilence or woe,
But here, at the far edge of earth and main,
  Whence light and love and resurrection flow,—
And I upon thy breast, to soothe the pain!
Immortal life assured, what mattereth
That it be not the old fond life of breath!
Immortal life assured, the soul is free—
It is enough to be!
For lo! the love, the dream, to which is given
  Divine assurance by a mortal peace,
Mix with the wonders of supremest heaven,
  Become a part of that which cannot cease,
And being eternal must be beauteous too,
  And being beauteous, surely must be glad!
O love, my love, thy wildest dreams were true,
  Though thou wert footsore in thy quest, and
    sad!
Not in a mist of hungry eyes dies he
  Who loveth purely nobler light than theirs;
For him nor weariness nor agony,
  Purblind appeals, nor prayers;

But circled by the peace serene and holy
  Of that divinest thought he loved so long,
Pensive, not melancholy,
  He mingles with those airs that made him strong,—
A little loath to quit
  The old familiar dwelling-house of clay,
Yet calm, as the warm wind dissolveth it,
  And leaf by leaf it droppeth quite away.
To him the priceless boon
  To watch from heights serene till all be done;
Calm in each dreamy rising of the Moon,
  Glad in each glorious coming of the Sun!

HOURS.

The stars are fading away in wonder,
Small sounds are stirring around and under,
Far away, from beneath the ocean,
We hear a murmur of wheels in motion,
And the wind that brings it along rejoices,—
Our hearts beat quicker, we lift our voices!

EOS.

It is Apollo! Hitherward he urges
  His four steeds, steaming odorous fumes of day;

Along his chariot-wheels the white sea surges,
  As up he drives his fiery-footed way.

TITHONOS.

Ye brighten, O ye columns round about!
  Ye melt in purple shades, arches and towers!
Cloud-roof, thou partest, and white hands slip out.
  Scattering pearls and flowers!
Brighter and brighter, blazing red and gold,
  Purple and amethyst, that float and fly!—
While, creeping in, a dawn-wind fresh and cold
  Pours silver o'er the couch whereon I lie!
Afar the coming of Apollo grows!
  His breath lifts up my hair! my pulses beat!
  My beard is moist with dews divinely sweet,
My lap is fill'd with sparkling leaves of rose,
Wherein my fingers, witherëd and sere,
Grope palsiedly in joy!—Afar I hear
The low, quick breathing that the earth is making—
Eastward she turns her dewy side, awaking.
But thou! but thou!
  Insufferably brightening!
Thy feet yet bathed in moist still shade, thy brow
  Glistening and lightening,

Thy luminous eyes enlarging, ring on ring
  Of liquid azure, and thy golden hair
Unfolding downward, curl on curl, to cling
  Around thy silken feet rose-tipt and bare!
Thy hands stretch'd out to catch the flowers down-flowing,
  Thy blushing look on mine, thy light green vest
In balmy airs of morning backward blowing
  From one divine white breast!
The last star melts above thee in the blue,
  The cold moon shrinks her horn, as thou dost go
Parnassos-ward, flower-laden, dripping dew,
  Heralding him who cometh from below!

Hours.

I.

Our hearts beat quicker, we lift our voices,
The east grows golden, the earth rejoices,
White clouds part with a radiant motion,
Moist sails glimmer beneath on Ocean,
And downward tripping, the sweet Immortal
Blushingly pauses without the portal!

2.

Eos! Eos! the sound from under
Deepens in music and might and wonder:
Thou standest now on Parnassos' mountain,
Thy feet drip pearls from the sacred fountain,
And the sisters nine, to thy bright skirt clinging,
Greet thee with smiling and mystic singing!

3.

Eos! Eos! all earth beholds thee,
The light of the sunrise there infolds thee,
A cry comes up from the earth below thee,
Mountains and forests and waters know thee,
Fresh airs thy robe are backward blowing,
Under thy footprints flowers are growing!

4.

Eos! Eos! the sound is louder!
Behind streams radiance fiercer and prouder!
A moment thou blushest, and glad we view thee,
Then Apollo the Fire-God speeds unto thee,
Speeding by with a smile he hails thee,—
And the golden cloud of his breathing veils thee!

GLOSSARY

OF A FEW SCOTTICISMS USED IN "THE SCAITH O' BARTLE."

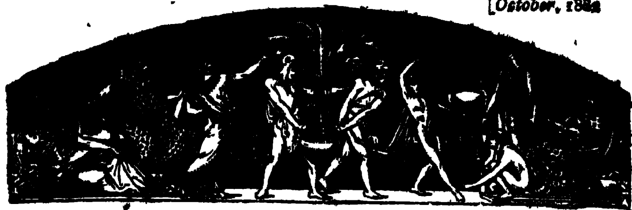
To avoid errors, (such as were not uncommon among readers of the "Idyls of Inverburn,") let it be understood that the English equivalents given below merely express the meanings the Scotch words bear *in the text*, and which they are in all instances capable of bearing.

Bickering, quarrelling.
Bield, house.
Birn, burthen.
Braxie, a distempered sheep.
Caird, wild strapping fellow.
Clachan, small village.
Corsy-belly, infant's first shirt.
Cowrie, stoop down.
Cushlingmushling, constantly muttering.
Cutty-stool, the stool of repentance, occupied in kirk by girls who have slipt.
Daft, silly.
Dawtie, darling.
Dree, bear sadly.
Fireflaught, sheet lightning.
Flyte, scold.
Gizzen, to dry up through drought.
Glamour, second-sight.
Greet, cry.
Howdie, midwife.

Jizzen bed, bed of labour.
Keek, peep
Kilble, strong
Kimmer, neighbour,
Lift, air, sky
Lowe, firelight.
Mid eild, middle age.
Mirk, dark.
Naip, ridge of a roof.
Pout, a plump girl
Ran tree, mountain ash.
Sark, shirt, chemise
Scaith, scourge, or plague.
Scunner, to shrink shudderingly.
Shieling, hut
Siller, money
Soopit, exhausted.
Sowe, shroud.
Speel, climb
Stanchgrass, yarrow, used to stanch bleeding.
Stoure, dust
Swaver, walk exhaustedly.
Thole, endure
Toom, empty.
Wanrest, uneasiness.
Whin, dwarf gorse.
Widdershins, something growing in a direction contrary to the sun-course.

THE END.

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